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FROM THE STREETS OF WASHINGTON TO THE ROOFS OF SAIGON:
DOMESTIC POLITICS AND THE TERMINATION OF THE VIETNAM WAR

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Abstract

This is a study of the termination of asymmetrical limited war. Its central thesis is that the major policy choices of a great state's leadership in the closing stages of such a war are best understood from an analysis of domestic politics. Two analytic tasks are undertaken to support this claim. The first task is to elaborate an institutional conception of how domestic politics influences policy making in asymmetrical limited war termination. An institutional view of domestic politics exposes the strong influence which domestic political motivations have on a President's foreign policy decisions and illuminates domestic political processes as powerful instruments which compel the President to respond to domestic imperatives, even in the face of certain external demands. The second analytic task is to defend this approach to the study of war termination against the challenge of structural realism. Wars seem particularly suited to structural-realist analyses because they are essentially contests of power. Knowing the distribution of power in the international system and the location of the belligerents within that system permits relatively certain predictions regarding the outcome of a conflict: strong nations win wars against weak nations. However, big nations don't always win their small wars. Moreover, the example of a great power disengaging from an undesirable war by means of a long, protracted withdrawal suggests some basis other than

(b) (c)

structural interests motivating state behavior. This paper argues that that basis is domestic politics. The body of this study applies a domestic politics analysis to the case of U.S. efforts to end the Vietnam War---a war which America lost to a much smaller power. Three focal points, or critical war termination decisions, frame the analysis: Lyndon Johnson's decision in 1968 to de-escalate the war; Richard Nixon's decision in 1969 to Vietnamize the war, withdraw American troops and negotiate a settlement; and Nixon's decision to formally accept peace terms in 1973. The institutional approach to domestic politics used here suggests that because a President is fundamentally politically motivated, he must be responsive to domestic political considerations. Consequently, even foreign policy decisions are, under certain circumstances, essentially political.

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Abstract

This is a study of the termination of asymmetrical limited war. Its central thesis is that the major policy choices of a great state's leadership in the closing stages of such a war are best understood from an analysis of domestic politics. Two analytic tasks are undertaken to support this claim. The first task is to elaborate an institutional conception of how domestic politics influences policy making in asymmetrical limited war termination. An institutional view of domestic politics exposes the strong influence which domestic political motivations have on a President's foreign policy decisions and illuminates domestic political processes as powerful instruments which compel the President to respond to domestic imperatives, even in the face of certain external demands. The second analytic task is to defend this approach to the study of war termination against the challenge of structural realism. Wars seem particularly suited to structural-realist analyses because they are essentially contests of power. Knowing the distribution of power in the international system and the location of the belligerents within that system permits relatively certain predictions regarding the outcome of a conflict: strong nations win wars against weak nations. However, big nations don't always win their small wars. Moreover, the example of a great power disengaging from an undesirable war by means of a long, protracted withdrawal suggests some basis other than

structural interests motivating state behavior. This paper argues that that basis is domestic politics. The body of this study applies a domestic politics analysis to the case of U.S. efforts to end the Vietnam War---a war which America lost to a much smaller power. Three focal points, or critical war termination decisions, frame the analysis: Lyndon Johnson's decision in 1968 to de-escalate the war; Richard Nixon's decision in 1969 to Vietnamize the war, withdraw American troops and negotiate a settlement; and Nixon's decision to formally accept peace terms in 1973. The institutional approach to domestic politics used here suggests that because a President is fundamentally politically motivated, he must be responsive to domestic political considerations. Consequently, even foreign policy decisions are, under certain circumstances, essentially political.

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Author's Note

The views expressed in this dissertation are those of the author and do not reflect the official policy or position of the Department of the Army, the Department of Defense, or the United States Government.

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Abbreviations and Acronyms

ARVN	Army of the Republic of [South] Vietnam
B-52	U.S. Heavy Bomber
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
CINCPAC	Commander-in-Chief, Pacific Command
CJCS	Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff
COMUSMACV	Commander, US Military Assistance Command, Vietnam
CORDS	Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support
DIA	Defense Intelligence Agency
DMZ	Demilitarized Zone
DOD	Department of Defense
DRV	Democratic Republic of [North] Vietnam
FY	Fiscal Year [October 1-September 30]
GVN	Government of [South] Vietnam
ISA	Office of International Security Affairs, DOD
I Corps	Northern military region in South Vietnam
II Corps	Central military region in South Vietnam
III Corps	Military region in South Vietnam surrounding Saigon
IV Corps	Southern Military region in South Vietnam
JCS	Joint Chiefs of Staff
M-16	Small Arms Rifle used by U.S. and ARVN Forces
MAAG	Military Assistance Advisory Group
MACV	Military Assistance Command, Vietnam
MIA	Missing in Action
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NLF	National Liberation Front
NSAM	National Security Action Memorandum
NSC	National Security Council
NSSM	National Security Study Memorandum
NVA	North Vietnamese Army
PRG	Provisional Revolutionary Government [formerly NLF]
RVN	Republic of [South] Vietnam
RVNAF	Republic of [South] Vietnam Armed Forces
VC	Viet Cong

Introduction

Why do large, powerful nations sometimes lose small, limited wars? Why does it often take so long for great states to end such wars? One expects large and powerful nations to win their small wars and to do so in short order. But history gives us a number of cases where our expectations in this regard are disappointed. Britain's ill-fated Boer war, and the shocking defeat of Russia at the hands of Japan in the Russo-Japanese war of 1904-1905 are but two examples. The decades following World War II provide further instances of this phenomenon. The experience of France in Vietnam and Algeria, the United States in Vietnam, and the Soviet Union in Afghanistan all illustrate conflict involving belligerents with grossly disproportionate power capabilities and conflict in which the more powerful nation disengaged only with great difficulty and without having realized its war aims. What is it about limited war, the fighting nations, or both, that yields such unanticipated results?

The limited wars cited here all share three striking characteristics: first, in each, the principal belligerents were dramatically mis-matched in power capabilities; large nations fought small ones. Secondly, the war for the more powerful state was limited, while the conflict for the weaker state was total. Thus while the larger nation held an clear power advantage, the stakes in the conflict generated

asymmetries of motivation which favored the smaller state.¹ And finally, in each case, the more powerful nation failed to defeat its smaller adversary and emerged from the conflict with its international reputation severely damaged for the experience. This study classifies these wars as asymmetrical limited wars.²

The dominant paradigm in the study of international relations, structural realism, holds that states are like actors operating on a 'self-help' basis in an anarchic international environment to safeguard their security and sovereignty by maximizing their power. Inter-state relations are characterized by competition and conflict.³ Structural

1 The importance of the phenomenon of asymmetry of motivation was articulated and emphasized in the work of Alexander George, David K. Hall and William R. Simons, The Limits of Coercive Diplomacy, (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1971).

2 The term 'asymmetrical limited war' expands on the notions of asymmetrical conflict as discussed in Andrew J.R. Mack's "Why Big Nations Lose Small Wars," World Politics 27 (January 1975): 175-200. In the present study, 'asymmetrical' refers to the power imbalance that exists between the principal parties to a war and 'limited' refers to the objectives sought in the war. The term 'asymmetrical limited war' intentionally takes the perspective of the more powerful nation. For the smaller adversary, we would classify the wars under discussion here as asymmetrical total wars.

3 The cornerstone works of structural realism are Hans J. Morgenthau, Politics Among Nations, 4th ed. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1967), and Kenneth Waltz, Man, the State, and War (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959), and Theory of International Politics (New York: Random House, 1979.)

realists view the state as a rational unitary actor and explain state behavior from an analysis of the distribution of power within the international system and the individual state's position in that distribution. Structuralism assumes that the motivation behind a state's behavior in its international dealings is tightly linked to the state's structural interests which includes such things as power and reputation. The outcomes of asymmetrical limited war suggest, however, that this strong linkage between a state's international behavior and its structural interests might not always be so tight. For the powerful nations in these wars, motivation appears to be heavily dependent upon domestic political imperatives, and these imperatives can vary dramatically from a state's structural interests.

The present work is a study of war termination. Its central thesis is that the major policy choices of a great state's leadership in the closing stages of such a war are best understood, not from an analysis of their structural motivations, but rather from their domestic sources. This assertion points to a potent, but often disregarded element in foreign policy analysis: in the innumerable international dealings between states that do not involve national survival, the external stimulus of foreign policy accounts for only a part---and in many cases only a small part---of the substance of that policy; domestic political considerations account for the rest. In other words, much of

a state's foreign policy---its timing, character, and potency---is less a response to external motivations than to domestic imperatives.

To support these claims, two analytic tasks are undertaken: the first task is to elaborate an institutional conception of how domestic politics influences policy making in asymmetrical limited war termination. An institutional view of domestic politics not only enlarges the cast of foreign policy principals as originally formulated by Allison in his model of bureaucratic politics,⁴ it exposes the strong influence which domestic political motivations have on a President's foreign policy decisions and illuminates domestic political processes as powerful instruments which compel the President to respond to domestic imperatives, even in the face of certain external demands.

The second analytic task is to defend this approach to the study of war termination against the strong challenge of structural realism. To argue that domestic politics offers a superior means of understanding some important instances of war termination is to challenge structuralism in one of its most secure domains---its power for predicting outcomes of international conflict. Wars seem particularly suited to structural-realist analyses for several reasons: first, because the anarchic nature of the international system leads

⁴ Graham T. Allison, Essence of Decision, (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1971.)

to competition between states, structural-realists do not view war as an aberrant condition of the international environment. Since security and sovereignty are enduring and irreducible interests shared by every state, the fact that nations might be moved to war to protect these interests is perfectly anticipated; indeed, expected. Structuralism can account for wars and their general character. Secondly, the simplifying assumption of the state as a rational-unitary actor appears particularly apt for nations at war. When core interests are threatened, a nation's leadership tends to be insulated from the political vicissitudes of its domestic constituency. The state 'makes' certain decisions in war and 'takes' certain actions which are then explained by the analyst who imputes values to the observed behavior. The domestic political configuration is treated as extraneous (though perhaps interesting) information that does not importantly influence the analysis.⁵ Thirdly, and most relevant for our purposes, wars are contests of power. Knowing the distribution of power in the international system and the location of the belligerents within that system permits relatively certain predictions regarding the outcome

⁵ If country A attacks country B, it is safe to assume that B will respond in kind if it is able. That the legislature or the executive was responsible for the decision to react is less important to understanding the event than the simple observation that B responded to A's attack.

of a conflict. Strong nations win wars and weak nations lose them.

We have, however, a number of historical cases that don't conform to the expectations of structural realism. The post-war era alone offers several. In 1954 France was clearly more powerful than Vietnam, yet in the wake of its disastrous defeat at Dien Bien Phu was forced to withdraw in defeat from its former colony. Similarly, the United States outstripped North Vietnam in nearly every conceivable measure of power during the course of its war with that nation, yet it engaged in a long, protracted withdrawal; its war aims left unfulfilled. And the experience of the Soviet Union in Afghanistan offers but the most recent example of this same phenomenon. When Mikhail Gorbachev became General Secretary of the Communist Party in 1985, he declared that his nation would end its war in Afghanistan. Yet the tortuous withdrawal of Soviet forces has taken nearly four years to complete, leaving many to wonder why it could not have been accomplished more rapidly with less gratuitous loss of life.

The results of these wars demonstrate that contrary to the expectations of structural realism, big nations don't always win their small wars. Moreover, the example of clearly superior powers disengaging from undesirable wars with less able adversaries by means of a long, protracted withdrawal, (forfeiting in the process the full achievement of their war aims) suggests some basis other than structural interests

motivating state behavior. This paper argues that that basis is domestic politics.

To be sure, when nations are moved to war to defend and protect their very survival as a sovereign state---when nations are moved to total war---structuralism offers a powerful explanation for events; motivated by the need to survive, the state will fight on until it defeats its adversary or until it finds itself defeated. The great wars of this century have often been called total wars. But many wars are not total---not characterized by a fully mobilized population focused on ensuring the survival of the state. In these limited wars, such as the conflict that has simmered for years between Libya and Chad, adversaries of approximately equal strength vie with each other for some limited objective---control of territory, for example---rather than the extermination of one's opponent. Asymmetrical limited war, however, differs from symmetrical limited war. These are conflicts in which one belligerent seeks limited objectives while its opponent perceives itself locked in total war, and structuralism is pained to account for these situations. We must look elsewhere for aid in understanding this important class of events.

The present work takes some steps in this direction and argues the merits of a domestic politics approach to some important aspects of foreign policy. The termination of a limited war involving unevenly matched adversaries suggests a significant instance in which a domestic politics perspective

is a more appropriate means of apprehending reality. To develop this claim, I examine one of the cases touched on above: the termination of American involvement in Vietnam.

The ending of the war in Vietnam is an apt illustration of the role of domestic politics in war termination for several reasons which are derived in part from the nature of the American democratic society and in part from the nature of limited war. First, democracies, by their nature, enfranchise more of the constituent society in governance than do totalitarian or oligopolistic regimes. That is, when compared to studies of nations in which the processes of government are less, or virtually in-accessible to non-governmental actors, an analysis of a democratic society allows a fuller consideration of the role and influence of domestic political factors in the policy making process.

Second, wars of relatively short duration that are decided largely on the basis of military superiority offer few opportunities for factors extraneous to the immediate prosecution of the war to influence the conclusion of that war. The converse is that the longer a war lasts, and the more it appears that an end to the war cannot be brought about through military efforts exclusively, the greater the opportunity for other factors, namely domestic political factors, to exercise an influence in the resolution of that war. Indeed, this was the case during the closing stages of Vietnam as it was earlier in the French defeat in Indochina.

Third, actual efforts to conclude U.S. involvement in Vietnam provided an opportunity for domestic politics to play a significant role in policy making not only because of the sheer length of the termination process, but also because that process overlay two Presidential and three Congressional elections---political exercises which allow political interests to become opportunities for policy influence.

Finally, war and its institutions reflect the social environments from which they spring. All wars are fought within a political context, and a focus on the role of domestic politics in war termination illuminates the essential relationship between military force and its political purpose. The example of Vietnam suggests that when the application of force becomes grossly disarticulated from its political purpose, the war loses meaning and prompts a nation to seek its exit from that war.

The study begins with a brief foray into the small but growing body of scholarly literature which exists on war termination. Much of the current work on war termination consists of limited theoretical probes and impressionistic though insightful treatments of the subject; some important concepts regarding the termination of war have been illuminated, and serve usefully to ground the present undertaking. Chapter two offers an institutional analysis of domestic politics related specifically to the issues and processes of war termination. Its main thrust is that

because a President is at the fulcrum of a complex, often unpredictable political process, he must be sensitive to and often responsive (even when he would prefer not to be) to political considerations. In consequence, even his foreign policy decisions are, under certain circumstances, subject to the familiar political techniques and gamesmanship which characterize much of domestic policy. This work argues that the termination of asymmetrical limited war is just such a circumstance.

The body of this study considers the case of U.S. efforts to end the Vietnam War. Three focal points, or critical war termination decisions, were chosen to frame the analysis: a) the point at which the leaders of the larger nation consciously decides to end the war, as opposed to continue the fighting; b) the way in which they chose to end it, and; c) their recognition that the war had indeed ended. These theoretical points translate into specific questions regarding the United States and Vietnam: a) When did the American leadership determine that it had to actively intervene to end the war, rather than let the fighting on the battlefield determine its outcome? b) How would the war be brought to a close? That is, given the decision that the war had to end, how would this be accomplished? Through negotiation? Immediate and unilateral withdrawal? Nuclear bombs? and; c) What conditions would need to hold for the

belligerents to agree that the war had ended? That is, how would they know the end of the war when they saw it?⁶

The beginning of the end of America's war in Vietnam is fixed, for the purposes of this study, as March 31, 1968, the date that Lyndon Johnson announced that he was suspending a significant portion of the bombing of North Vietnam and would seek to negotiate a settlement to the war. From this moment onward, much of the policy effort in Washington shifted from war fighting (to achieve military 'victory') to war terminating.

Given, then, that the war would end, the question became one of how? The new President, Richard Nixon, adopted a manifold strategy to end the war: he would attempt to negotiate a settlement with North Vietnam while gradually handing over the principal responsibility for fighting the war to the South Vietnamese in a process known as Vietnamization. In tandem with these actions, the President began to order the withdrawal of American troops from Vietnam at first sporadically, but later on a more regular basis geared often to the requirement to maintain domestic political acceptance of his overall policy. Importantly, while the withdrawal of American troops was originally

⁶ In limited war, recognizing the end of the war 'when you see it,' approximates the point of war termination. In total war the ending point is marked by the defeat of one's adversary. In limited war, total defeat is not a goal of the fighting and therefore it becomes more difficult to determine the conditions which will signal the conclusion of the war.

contingent upon the mutual withdrawal of North Vietnamese forces from South Vietnam, by May 1971, the U.S. had dropped this demand and continued its withdrawals on a unilateral basis. The possibility existed that the war would end for the United States, if not through a negotiated settlement, than through the simple absence of American combat forces in Vietnam.

The point at which the belligerents agreed that the war, for the United States, was over, is fixed as the date on which the Paris Accords were signed, January 27, 1973. Some may take issue with this date, arguing that the war did not end until the fall of Saigon on April 30, 1975, over two years later. While there are strong arguments in favor of this date as the point at which the war ended for the Vietnamese, for the United States, the war was already over. U.S. ground combat operations had ceased several years before and there is little evidence to suggest that Nixon could have succeeded in re-introducing American soldiers onto the Indochina peninsula even if he had been so inclined---an inclination which the record also does not support. Additionally, we could not have foreseen the overrunning of Saigon in April 1975 from the vantage point of January 1973 (though few would argue the tenuous nature of the 'peace' that immediately followed the signing of the Paris Accords). Moreover, the possibility cannot be excluded that, had the Watergate revelations not compelled Nixon to resign and so thoroughly undermined many of the powers of the American

Presidency, he would have taken stronger measures, short of renewed combat, to assist South Vietnam in its crisis of late 1974-early 1975 (although to do so the President would have had to overcome or bypass strong Congressional and public opposition.)⁷ Analytically and substantively, the signing of the Paris Accords marked the end of the war for the United States. Though hostilities did again break out between North and South Vietnam, this can be represented as the beginning of a new war.⁸

These three Presidential decisions: Johnson's decision in 1968 to de-escalate the war; Nixon's decision in 1969 to Vietnamize the war and withdraw American troops; and the decision to formally declare the war to be at an end in 1973, represent the significant policy choices taken during the process of ending U.S. involvement in the Vietnam War.

Each of these decisions occurs within a structural framework and lies imbedded in a particular domestic political condition. It is a burden of this study to demonstrate that the policy decisions under examination here are, in the main, Presidential responses to the domestic political imperatives, and not to the structural conditions

⁷ Evidence presented in the epilogue supports this contention.

⁸ Indeed, in late 1973, South Vietnamese President Nguyen Van Thieu announced the beginning of a 'third Indochina war.' See "The End of the Tunnel: 1973-1975" in Vietnam, A Television History. Public Broadcasting Service, WGBH, Boston, 1983.

(indeed, one might argue that the decisions were made in spite of the perceived structural demands). This study must convincingly establish that, in important circumstances such as an asymmetrical limited war that develops into a prolonged, costly stalemate, domestic political considerations can play a major role in foreign policy, particularly when strong structural incentives militate against the policy chosen. If successful, this work will add to our understanding of the strength and play of domestic politics in foreign policy.

Chapter 1

Theoretical Issues in War Termination

War termination has been, despite spurts of furious activity, generally neglected as a field of study. This academic slight is somewhat odd, given scholars preoccupation with why and how wars begin. Though many observers believe that if the causes of war can be thoroughly understood, perhaps we can arrive at the point where wars can be prevented, the experience of this century is evidence enough to suggest that the efforts of scholars and great thinkers pondering the questions of why wars start have brought them no closer to eliminating the object of their study.

This realization, one would think, might have served to inspire those same scholars to seek an understanding of how wars end, given that they invariably seem to start. But this has not been the case; war termination remains largely unexplored theoretical territory. While it appears that scholars are slowly beginning to embrace war termination as an interesting and important field of study,¹ much work

¹ The most recent efforts include work by C.R. Mitchell and Michael Nicholson, "Rational Models and the Ending of Wars," Journal of Conflict Resolution 27 (September 1983): 495-520; Paul J. Pillar, Negotiating Peace: War Termination as a Bargaining Process. Princeton: University Press, 1983; Francis A. Beer and Thomas F. Mayer, "Why Wars End: Some Hypotheses," Review of International Studies 12 (April

remains---particularly in the area of developing a systematic analytical framework within which one can understand the numerous factors and the means through which they interrelate in the war termination process.

The ending of a war is influenced by structural systemic considerations, such as the relative power distribution between belligerents and their alliance configurations; by factors related directly to the conduct of the war such as the belligerents' relative military superiority or ambiguity surrounding the question of just which side is indeed the stronger; by factors related to the non-military attempts of the belligerents to resolve their differences (i.e. negotiations); and by factors dealing with the domestic political situation within the nations at war. While an analysis of each of these sets of factors provides some insight into the dynamic of settling a war, none is itself sufficient for understanding that process in its entirety. Some are, however, better than others for understanding why asymmetrical limited wars end when and how they do.

By way of a general beginning, let us consider the following questions: Why are wars, the most costly means of settling international dispute, apparently very difficult to stop once they have started? How do national decision-

1986): 95-106; Leon V. Sigal, Fighting to a Finish, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988.

makers, once having arrived at the decision that a war must end, end the war? Which factors speed this process; which prevent it? How does the process of war termination shape the character and scope of the settlement agreement? The present work takes the position that an analysis of war termination from a domestic politics perspective suggests interesting and useful answers to these questions.

Though this study explicitly deals with the domestic political structure of the United States, I believe its central argument can be abstracted for wider application for societies similarly structured. Many of the industrialized nations which make up the modern international system share certain characteristics, and the notion of domestic politics used here captures the essence of this similarity.

Within the governments of the industrialized nations of the world there are individuals, or a small group of individuals, who command the power to make foreign policy decisions affecting the entire nation. In the United States this power rests largely in the office of the President, in Great Britain with the Prime Minister, and in the Soviet Union with the General Secretary of the Communist Party and the Politburo. Moreover, the majority of these societies have some larger representative body organized to address the needs of the larger population. In the United States this is Congress, in the Federal Republic of Germany this is the Bundestag, and in France the Parliament. In each of these nations, the government has a bureaucracy to attend to its

administrative needs, and a military to guarantee the sovereignty of the country, and further, there are extra-governmental organizations such as industry, the media and interest groups which exert influence in the policy making process (with varying degrees of opportunity and success.) It is to these societies, the modern industrialized nations of the world, which the discussion of domestic politics as presented here might be applied.²

Surveying the Field

I would misrepresent the actual state of affairs if I were to speak of the 'literature' on war termination. But the collection of articles, scholarly and otherwise, and the few compendia concerned with war termination, represent written

² The use of this view of domestic politics and war termination has certain limitations. I see them principally as two stemming from consideration of the type of society at war, and the type of war being waged. An institutional view of domestic politics seems inappropriate when applied to certain developing nations. In these states, the relationship among the different agencies of government or between the government and the governed might resemble that of industrialized nations only at the limits of intellectual tolerance. Clearly a sense of domestic politics derived from an industrialized western nation is less useful for understanding how societies of a radically different type would end its wars. Secondly, a domestic politics analysis might itself be inappropriate for understanding how certain kinds of wars end---i.e. a war in which the objectives for both sides are total, or a war of exceedingly short duration. The present discussion of war termination attempts to understand the role of domestic politics in the process of ending a war by drawing on a specific society---the United States, in a specific war---Vietnam. I invite application of the essential theoretical argument to other societies in other wars to test the limits of its applicability.

knowledge on the subject to date, and it is with this body of work that one must begin.³ Within this material, agreement on certain fundamental concepts remains elusive. The expression "termination" is itself problematic and has been considered both the point at which a war has ended and the process through which that ending was achieved. In the absence of formal instruments of war termination, establishing the point at which a war has ended presents a particularly difficult problem. How do we distinguish a cessation of hostilities or cease-fire from a more or less stable peace settlement?⁴ More generally, how do we know that a war has terminated; and how can we specify exactly what that means? Did the Vietnam war 'end' in 1973, with the signing of the Paris Peace Accords, or in 1975 with the evacuation of Saigon? Or indeed, did it rage several years more, only without the United States? Or did the war itself, in fact, rage from the late 1940s to the late 1970s, with the cast of actors changing on a constant stage?

Despite its shortcomings, the literature on war termination can be considered several ways, and indeed, hardly any two literature surveys of existing material are organized

³ The relevant literature is cited throughout the references in this chapter.

⁴ For a discussion of the distinctions see Janice Gross Stein, "War Termination and Conflict Resolution, or How Wars Should End," Jerusalem Journal of International Relations 1 (Fall 1975): 1-27.

similarly.⁵ In this study, I consider theories of war

⁵ Michael Handel has identified five categories of research into which work on war termination has generally fallen--normative, economic, international law, diplomatic history and theory of international relations ("War Termination-A Critical Survey", Jerusalem Papers on Peace Problems, Jerusalem, 1978). Normative studies of war termination consider the moral implications of war and peace. This category is by no means consensual, including both 'just war' theories and the so-called 'peace studies.' Economic studies of war termination center around the potential economic impact of continued war or imminent peace. These studies, like their opposite numbers which seek to explain a war's origin, trace the roots of any meaningful action in a war termination process to an economic source. Resolution of hostilities is obtained when the economic equilibrium between belligerents is either restored by choice or imposed by necessity.

International law focuses more precisely on the treaties and other means by which nations formally draw hostilities to a close. This is perhaps the most coherent body of literature on the subject, if only for the length of time formal documents have been employed by men to record their agreements. Diplomatic history provides a rich and detailed account of events leading up to and during the war termination process, but gives little or no theoretical frame on which to hang the facts so faithfully represented. Handel suggests that the most fruitful body of study has been in his last category of international relations theory, and it is within this category that the present study is conducted.

As an alternative approach, Berenice A. Carroll in a useful, though now dated, review of war termination hypotheses observed that there were five general categories of questions regarding how wars are brought to a close: definition and classification (e.g. How does one define the point at which a war ends?), descriptive or quantitative (e.g. What are the types and frequencies of wars' ends throughout history?), analytical (e.g. Can factors be discerned which account for war termination? Does every war have a 'decisive battle?'), evaluative (e.g. What does the manner in which a war concludes foretell of the subsequent peace?), and policy (e.g. What are the conditions under which an advantageous close to war is possible?). Berenice A. Carroll "How Wars End: An Analysis of Some Current Hypotheses" Journal of Peace Research 6 (1969): 295-321, pp. 296-297. Though she focused on the hypotheses derived from the descriptive and analytical sets of questions, classification, evaluation and policy implications of war termination have had their advocates. In another effort, Carroll divided existing war termination theories into two categories: "fightlike and gamelike." See her discussion in

termination by dividing them somewhat arbitrarily according to the levels of analysis in conventional use in American Political Science: structural/systemic, strategic interaction, decision-making, and domestic politics. But before doing this, two points deserve discussion in order to clarify the concept of war termination as it is used in the present work.

The first point concerns an implicit assumption often made in studies of war that the end of the war always leads to the beginning of the peace. This assumption equates war with conflict and termination with peace. In fact, political conflict may continue by non-military means even after the formal, organized fighting stops. No one, for example, would assert that with the conclusion of the Yom Kippur war in 1973, Egypt, Syria, and Israel were not still in conflict; and few officials in Saigon believed that their troubles were over with the drying of the ink in Paris. There is a useful, and indeed necessary, distinction to be made between war

"War Termination and Conflict Theory: Value Premises, Theories and Policies" in The Annals of The American Academy of Political and Social Science 392 (November 1970), pp. 14-29.

Wallace Thies makes use of yet a different approach. Observing two key elements in the war termination process, 1) bargaining and signalling between belligerents, and 2) the conceptual models each side uses in interpreting the other's actions, Thies uses these as a typological basis for organizing and assessing past studies of war termination. Wallace J. Thies, "Searching for Peace: Vietnam and the Question of How Wars End." Polity 7 (Spring 1975): 304-333, pp. 313.

termination and conflict resolution. The first is clearly a necessary, though not sufficient condition for the latter.⁶ Thus for the purposes of this study, war termination is the process by which nations involved in armed struggle over the pursuit of incompatible objectives end that involvement. With a war's end, conflict may still exist, but the method of brokering the conflict comes under a different set of rules.

The second point regards the scope of war termination--- that is, war termination for whom? It is clear that for wars involving more than two belligerents, war termination becomes a much more complicated business. The end of wars in which obligated alliances (where an ally is bound to continue fighting so long as the main belligerent does) or coalition warfare are present imply that when at the time of termination, all parties to the conflict cease fighting. But what of those situations where a party to a conflict, principal or otherwise, leaves early, or changes the nature of its commitment? Has the war been terminated? An answer to this question lies in the careful specification of the subject of analysis. The United States in Vietnam provides an example.

From 1965 until 1973, the United States maintained an active ground force commitment in South Vietnam representing, for the balance of those years, the strongest belligerent

⁶ Handel, Ibid., p. 10. See also, Stein, Ibid.

opposed to North Vietnam. But with the signing of the Paris Accords in January 1973, the U.S. withdrew its remaining combat forces, and assumed a secondary role in the conflict supporting the South Vietnamese who assumed the position of principal belligerent.

In the interest of clarity then, any treatment of war termination must explicitly establish its analytical domain. For our purposes, war termination is not simply the end of "...the condition which prevails while groups are contending by arms," but rather the condition which obtains when a belligerent ceases its attempt to resolve its differences with its adversary principally through the means of force.⁷ For the United States, the Vietnam war ended in Paris on January 27, 1973.

Having specified the conception of war termination used in this study, I turn now to a consideration of available theories. As previously mentioned, I have divided up existing work into structural and sub-structural groupings to evaluate how well they account for the phenomena in which I am interested. We will first examine structural-systemic theories and the hypotheses they generate.

Structural Theories

⁷ Drawn from Quincy Wright A Study of War (Chicago: University Press, 1965), p. 8, ff.

Structural theories of war termination are derived from consideration of the anarchic nature of the international system, the distribution of power among the member states, and the self-regarding behavior of those states particularly regarding issues of security and sovereignty. One survey of theoretical issues associated with war termination suggests several structural hypotheses which stem from three dimensions of the international system: aggregation, polarization and militarization.⁸

Aggregation refers to a process whereby smaller units of the world system are incorporated into larger units. States are not only known by their sovereign identity but also by their membership in international unions. Defense and economic associations are the most common manifestations of increased international aggregation. The existence of many or large such associations imply increased agreement among

⁸ Francis A. Beer and Thomas F. Mayer. "Why Wars End: Some Hypotheses." Review of International Studies 12 (April 1986): 95-106, especially pp. 100-103. Though their discussion of structural/systemic hypotheses is extremely limited, it represents, to date, the only explicit effort of its type and is therefore examined in some detail here. The present discussion of structural hypotheses of war termination draws heavily on the parameters of the international structure presented in their work but also suggests an expanded interpretation of those systemic characteristics. Though beyond the scope of this project, a good deal of additional research on structural factors, such as the role of third party intermediaries, the influence of geographical proximity of the war zone, and the international reputational effects associated with victory or defeat remains to be done. See also Francis A. Beer, Peace Against War: The Ecology of International Violence (San Francisco: W.H. Freeman, 1981.)

nations on a wide range of interaction and on the norms associated with that interaction. Aggregation is manifested in such things as international law, transnational cultural organizations, and economic markets.

Polarization refers to the differences among nations which take shape and persist within the international system.⁹ The ideological differences of the NATO-Warsaw Pact rivalry manifest security differences, but economic polarization can also exist. North-South studies which have focused on the dependent relationships that sprang from the days of colonial imperialism have highlighted economic polarization between the relatively wealthy, industrialized nations and the poorer, developing states.

Militarization is defined as the degree to which nations are inclined to resort to military means to resolve their differences. The greater the disparity in military capabilities among nation states, the higher the tendency for war to result. Conversely, as parity in military capabilities increases, the tendency toward war decreases. Each of these three dimensions of the international system offers certain insights regarding war termination. Among the hypotheses the theorists draw:

⁹ According to Beer and Mayer, polarization can occur along any or all of three dimensions: differentiation, inequality and instability, and, while each of these dimensions suggests hypotheses regarding war termination, they will not all be addressed in this survey, the interested reader is referred to pages 101-2 in their article.

If aggregation increases, the probability of terminating an ongoing war also increases.¹⁰

In the process of aggregation, nations tend to share more and more common interests, or at least share notions of how interests are pursued. Because interaction norms increase in systems with high levels of aggregation, there are more mechanisms by which warring nations can resolve their differences without resorting to additional warfare. Further, because of increased interaction among nations in general, the contending parties have greater incentives and an expanded basis on from which to cooperate.

Polarization refers essentially to the amount of latent conflict within an international system, and the extent to which polarization is or is not prevalent in a system has implications for war termination. Thus the hypothesis:

Decreasing instability of the international context in which a war takes place will shorten the duration of that war.¹¹

The implication is that a generally stable international system would encourage belligerents to settle armed disputes as rapidly as possible. This is not to suggest that a system which is unstable will discourage early termination, but while an unstable system might not necessarily prolong a war, it clearly does little to encourage peace.

¹⁰ Beer and Mayer, *Ibid.*, p. 100.

¹¹ Beer and Mayer, *Ibid.*, p. 101.

Within an international system generally characterized by a tendency toward militarism, that tendency encourages, and is itself strengthened, by war. A system in which the tendency toward militarism is more diffuse is less prone to resolution of its international disputes through war. But while the general character of the international system has an influence on the termination of a war, the extent to which one or both of the belligerent nations feels constrained by the international system suggests the extent to which, despite their own militaristic inclinations, these nations might be inclined to seek an end to their armed conflict.

An implicit assumption of realist theories of international relations is that a state's behavior is tightly linked to its structural interests. Such a *realpolitik* view of things would ascribe three fundamental interests to all states: first, the acquisition and maintenance of power relative to other states; second, the safeguarding of national security and the preserving of sovereignty; and third, the maintenance and enhancement of national reputation within the system of states. If these structural interests indeed motivate a state's international behavior, we might derive from them some hypotheses regarding the termination of asymmetrical limited wars. Let us consider the first structural interest: power.

A great nation involved in an asymmetrical limited war is not taxed to the limits of its power resources in the

conflict. If nations are motivated by the pursuit of power, it would seem that in some sense, the power to be gained as a result of victory in the limited war must exceed that lost through the armed conflict. Therefore a simple cost-benefit analysis using the factor of national power yields the following hypothesis:

Great states will seek to end their involvement in limited wars when the power lost in the conduct of the war threatens to exceed that expected to be gained through military victory.

The second structural interest---the safeguarding and preserving of national security and sovereignty---at first blush seems to suggest little for the termination of asymmetrical limited wars. The security and sovereignty of a great state is normally not threatened when that state becomes involved in a limited war, particularly when it enjoys a decided power advantage over its adversary. Nevertheless, in democratic societies, there appears to be a complex relationship between a nation's security and its participation even in limited war.

One of the legacies of the French Revolution is the fact that democracies wage major wars as a society. When war threatens to become an enormously costly undertaking, the whole of a society becomes party to the conflict, and the leadership faces the task of mobilizing the population to support the war effort. "National Security" is a strong justification which motivates people to accept the death and

destruction incurred in war. The cry goes up that the war must be fought lest life as we know it disappear. Even in limited war, where the security and sovereignty of a great power is not in proximate danger, this rationale can be applied with some force. A limited war must be fought, the argument goes, because although this particular conflict does not seriously threaten us, our failure to respond (or our response ending in failure) could lead to further, worse challenges in the future. This connection, however remote, between national security and the willingness of a state to take up arms yields the following:

A great power will seek to end its limited war when the conditions obtain that lead to a judgement that no its vital interests are no longer threatened.

It is important to recognize that victory for the great power---that is its defeat of the lesser state---is not the only condition which would persuade the great nation that its vital interests are not longer threatened. Protracted limited wars in which the belligerents find themselves mired in stalemate may result in a reevaluation of the original basis for the war inducing the leadership and the people of the great state to conclude that the threat as formerly perceived no longer exists.

A final structural incentive centers on the nation's reputation in the international system. Essentially the generalized estimate which nations have of each other,

reputation forms the basis of one state's predictions regarding the future conduct of another. Nations have incentives to behave in ways that preserve their international reputation. A number of benefits accrue to nations as a result of their international reputation. A powerful state has an especially strong interest in maintaining its reputation as a great nation, particularly as its power begins to wane.

The desire to preserve one's reputation can influence the action a great state takes in attempting to terminate a limited war. Indeed, reputational concerns are particularly poignant for large, powerful nations involved in asymmetrical limited wars, for at least two reasons. First, large nations are not expected to lose small wars or to have enormous difficulty in winning them. And secondly, while great powers are expected to 'win' such wars, they must be mindful of the rules of proportionality in their pursuit of victory. The complete annihilation of a lesser state by a more powerful nation in a limited war can undermine the reputation of the latter who is expected to moderate the application of its own power. Either the defeat of the larger nation or the excessive use of military power in victory can do a good deal of damage to the reputation of a great power state.

Because a damaged reputation results in diminished influence, the need to 'save face' can induce certain behaviors. These considerations suggest the following

hypothesis regarding the role of reputation in a state's efforts to terminate an asymmetrical limited war:

Great states will seek to end their limited wars to avoid incurring adverse reputational effects.

The vital security of a powerful nation is not generally threatened in a limited war with a smaller adversary, therefore we might expect to see states acting to end a war in order to preserve their reputation under any of the following conditions: when the prospects of a military defeat appear high; when they become entrenched in an indecisive stalemate; or when they appear able to secure victory only through the massive application of military might.

Strategic Interaction

There is another group of hypotheses regarding war termination which is derived from consideration of the strategic interaction between the belligerents. By focusing on the interdependent decision-making of nations at war, a strategic interaction analysis reveals the dynamics of signalling and bargaining attendant to efforts to negotiate a settlement to a war. In an analysis of this type, we can gain some understanding of policy outcomes (i.e. whether to end a war and what the nature of that termination will be) as a function of the decisions a nation's leaders make in response to the perceived actions and intentions of its

opponent.¹² The military exhaustion of the capacity to wage war, mutual or unilateral, is an outcome of the strategic interaction between belligerents. The following hypothesis is derived from a consideration of this extreme state:

Wars will end when the belligerents have exhausted their war-making capabilities.

This hypothesis implies mutual exhaustion, and wars have ended in this fashion; the state of the recent war between Iran and Iraq approximates a war terminated through mutual exhaustion.¹³ However, unilateral exhaustion would also precipitate the ending of a war---wars cannot go on if there is only one belligerent left fighting.

At the opposite end of the spectrum from the complete depletion of the ability to wage war, is the overwhelming ability not only to wage, but to win war. Clear military superiority suggests the following:

¹² For a useful discussion of the complexities of bargaining as a strategic interaction problem in which belligerents attempt to manipulate each other's values and perceptions of them, see Glenn H. Snyder and Paul Diesing, Conflict Among Nations (Princeton: University Press, 1977), chapter 3. Other valuable treatments include the whole of Fred C. Iklé's How Nations Negotiate (New York: Harper and Row, 1964), the second chapter of Thomas Schelling's The Strategy of Conflict, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1960), and chapter five of Schelling's Arms and Influence (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966).

¹³ But this is only an approximation. The winding down of this war is perhaps better explained through Iran and Iraq's mutual recognition that the military stalemate could not be altered by additional fighting which would only lead to further mutual exhaustion. (I am indebted to Alexander George for this clarification.)

A war will end when one nation militarily overwhelms (or effectively threatens to overwhelm) the other.

This is perhaps the most conventional view of war termination. Wars end when one side 'beats' the other. War termination here implies a clear winner and loser. But obviously there are those wars which have ended more ambiguously or with mixed outcomes.

Negotiation and bargaining in the process of ending a war is founded, in part, on the notion that warfare itself is a bargaining process by which belligerents seek to settle a dispute.¹⁴ By considering an entire war and its termination process as a complex bargaining problem, several hypotheses suggest themselves:

A war will end when the belligerent nations reach some measure of accommodation of the war objectives of each through concession or quid pro quo.

Or, since wars are means by which belligerent nations reduce their uncertainty regarding either their opponent's commitment to their stated war objectives or the opponent's ability to accomplish those objectives, we might surmise

Wars will tend to end when belligerent nations resolve their uncertainty regarding the opponent's commitment to war aims and their ability to achieve those aims.

This hypothesis anticipates several scenarios. Since the resolution of uncertainty occurs both as a result of the

¹⁴ See Paul J. Pillar, Negotiating Peace (Princeton: University Press, 1983), p. 3.

progress of the war and the progress of negotiations, war termination tends to occur when uncertainty is resolved, regardless of whether it is resolved mutually or unilaterally. That is, the tendency for a nation to pursue a military solution, as against a negotiated settlement is increased when that nation perceives an unwillingness on the part of its opponent to fight on (through a realization that its opponent is irresolute over its war aims and seeks to modify its demands during negotiations via important concessions).

Alternatively, the tendency for a nation to seek a negotiated end to a war would be increased if it perceived that its opponent was unwavering in its commitment to achieving its war aims with a demonstrated willingness to fight to the 'bitter end' to achieve them. This realization can induce the first nation to modify its utility for its own war aims in the face of certain prolonged struggle with a steadfast opponent. The situation between the United States and Japan at the close of World War II approaches this condition. Although America was not prepared to negotiate with Japan over the latter's capitulation, it did modify its demand of unconditional surrender and allow Emperor Hirohito to remain as head of that nation. Scholars have argued convincingly that the change in the position of the United States on this issue was due directly to its desire to hasten

the surrender of Japan and avoid additional, unnecessary, combat.¹⁵

A war's end is often seen as a direct function of a nation's success or failure to achieve its war aims. But the war aims of belligerents can change over the course of the war. If a war is going particularly well, a nation might be moved to seek even greater objectives. For example, a nation might enter a war in response to the aggressive behavior of another with the aim of reestablishing the status quo ante. Finding itself victorious however, it might be inclined to pursue the transgressor further to 'punish' it for causing the war in the first place, or in the extreme, annihilate it altogether. Conversely, if a war is going poorly, a nation can be induced to pare its original war aims down to the bare minimum, i.e. survival as a national entity, in order to end the war. If we can consider wars as armed disagreements, we might hypothesize that

A war will end when the minimum, irreducible demands (or objectives) of the opponents no longer conflict.

Derived from the complex relationship between belligerents which underlies the fundamental conflict, this hypothesis presumes that wars cannot end as long as a belligerent nation

¹⁵ See, for example, Paul Kecskemeti, Strategic Surrender, Palo Alto, California: Stanford University Press, 1958; and Leon V. Sigal, Fighting to a Finish, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988.

perceives that its minimum interests conflict with those of its opponent. The future of the Thieu regime in the Vietnam negotiations serves as a modest example to illustrate the point. For some time the North Vietnamese would not agree to a settlement in Paris as long as the Thieu government was allowed to remain in power in the South. For many months this issue was arguably the most significant obstacle to the conclusion of a peace settlement with the United States. In October of 1972, however, the North modified its demand, and dropped its insistence that Thieu go before they would agree to a cease-fire. This modification represented a major breakthrough in the talks and formal cease-fire agreement followed within months.

Decision-Making

One has only to leaf casually through the memoirs of the world's great leaders to develop a sense of the importance an individual can have in the shaping and timing of significant international events. Has the presence (or absence) of a key decision-maker or other significant individual, perhaps a third party mediator, been decisive in a war termination process? How does one's image of the opponent (the conceptual model a key decision-maker has of his adversary) contribute to the ease or difficulty with which a war is terminated? How has misperception affected leaders' interpretations of their opponent's actions? The best answers to these

questions are suggested by study of historical examples and the theoretical work on decision-making.

In addition to the opinions expressed by the great leaders of history as they reminisce in print, many scholars have come to appreciate the singular importance a powerful individual can come to have in world affairs. One analyst has observed that, particularly during times of war, "the influence of a single individual is accentuated, and the possible damage he may inflict by delaying or evading a decision to end war is even greater than that caused by hesitancy in times of peace."¹⁶ Presumably this heightened influence has equally great potential for success through the strength of a compelling personality or timely and decisive decision-making.

In one study of war termination, the influence of a key leader was determined to be the single most important factor in the institution of post-war settlements which have produced relatively lengthy periods of peace.¹⁷ Though other factors combined to create conditions which favored these enduring settlements, this study highlights the strong leader, who, capitalizing on favorable opportunities and controlling adversities, 'made' the peace happen. While it

¹⁶ Handel, Op. Cit., p. 18.

¹⁷ Nissan Oren, "Prudence In Victory: The Dynamics of Post-War Settlements," Aspen Institute for Humanistic Studies, 1977.

is not unreasonable to believe that dominant individuals play important roles in the conduct of interstate affairs, in the modern era, the instance of a national leader ending a war through singular efforts is seldom encountered in the historical record. Charles DeGaulle's role in ending the French-Algerian war is a notable exception. His example suggests an interesting hypothesis particularly suited to the type of war of interest in this study:

When domestic forces are badly divided over the desirability of an unfavorable termination, the existence and influence of a strong leader is necessary to end the war.

Apart from studies of individual cases, the decision-making framework is less often applied to theoretical studies of war termination, but theoretical models at this level of analysis hold promise for greater insight into the why and how of the war termination process that cannot be easily or adequately answered by structural theories.

Rational choice theory, based on the assumptions that decision makers are rational utility maximizers confronting choice opportunities under conditions of uncertainty or risk suggests the following general hypothesis:

Wars end when national decision-makers calculate that the costs of continued fighting outweigh the costs of settling the dispute.

Game theory, a subset of rational choice, suggests that decision-making in war termination (indeed, decision-making

in general) might be modeled.¹⁸ Prisoner's Dilemma is a classic game where decision-makers, faced with uncertainty, realize that while their 'payoff' depends in part on the decision of the other player (in war, the opponent), they have no control over the other player's decision. In cases such as these, the most efficacious strategy depends on whether or not the game is iterative (tit for tat is best), or single play ('minimax' is best). Expected utility is another means of apprehending decision-making under conditions of uncertainty. According to expected utility theory, decision-makers assign probabilities to the expected states of nature which might occur and choose strategies based on the expected utility associated with each. The following hypothesis might be derived from an expected utility analysis:

If the difference in the expected utility each belligerent associates with a particular war outcome is great, the tendency for the war to end is decreased.

For each outcome that can result from a conflict, the value that one nation places on that outcome can be completely different from the value that its opponent has for that same outcome. For example, in a war where Country A desires the complete military defeat of Country B, this result is obviously not particularly valued by Country B, though it is

¹⁸ I thank Terry Moe and Bruce Bueno de Mesquita for their comments on this section.

highly valued by Country A. The above hypothesis suggests that since the expected utilities for this possible outcome are so far apart the prospects for war termination are diminished.

One rational approach to war termination has proposed that a view of war termination as a process wherein belligerent nations make rational calculations reveals a necessary condition for war termination.¹⁹ Unless both parties to a conflict believe that they can be made better off by a settlement, the war will continue: "[a]n agreement (either explicit or implicit) to end a war cannot be reached unless the agreement makes both sides better off; for each country the expected utility of continuing the war must be less than the expected utility of settlement."²⁰

¹⁹ Donald Wittman, "How A War Ends: A Rational Model Approach." Journal of Conflict Resolution 23 (December 1979): 743-763.

²⁰ Wittman, Ibid., p. 744. In normal expected utility notation this would mean that $U^t_x(s^*) \geq U^t_x(w)$ and $U^t_y(s^*) \geq U^t_y(w)$, that is, the settlement must make both countries better off than continuing the war (p. 747). A problem arises when one attempts to operationalize 'better off.' Wittman suggests war termination is not an action which can be taken unilaterally; that is, one party to a conflict cannot simply decide to end its involvement in a war without the complicity of its opponent. If one nation were to decide that its utility for settlement at any point in time was greater than its utility for continued warfare, it would be unable to achieve that settlement unless its opponent were similarly convinced that, for him, settlement was also valued more highly than fighting on. It appears then, that the above 'necessary condition' is little more than a truism. Thus, while we may have some means to judge, post hoc, that the reason a war ended was because the

Expected utility analysis which evaluates a nation's 'utility' for an outcome, actually considers the utility of the nation's leadership (though this is not always made explicit). When the risk propensity of that national decision-maker is introduced, we can hypothesize further:

The more risk-averse a decision-maker is, the more likely he is to seek an early end to a war.²¹

By suggesting that the difference between escalation and termination lies in the reputation of a nation's leader as a betting man, testing this hypothesis would require an indepth

belligerent nations' utility for settlement was greater than their utility for continued warfare, we have no information regarding the factors which contributed to the reassessment of those utilities. Following this approach, the analyst, and indeed often the decision-maker, can only know that certain decisions or actions brought the war to an end after it happened, and not before.

However, as Wittman observes, the fact that this condition must obtain for a war to end suggests that the intuitive relationships between the level of fighting and the proximity of a war ending do not necessarily hold. Thus, for example, a reduction in the level of hostilities may in fact reduce the likelihood of settlement (thereby serving to prolong the war). Similarly, increasing the likelihood of military victory does not necessarily result in an increased likelihood of settlement (pp. 749-754). Wittman maintains that these findings represent important results of his approach. Though I do not reject his work as a means for developing some understanding of the war termination process, I challenge the causal relationship he imputes between his theory and these results and reject the implication that these findings would remain obscure in the absence of an expected utility analysis.

²¹ The converse also follows: The more risk acceptant a decision-maker is, the more likely he is to escalate, rather than terminate.

study of individual leaders' 'operational codes.'²² But despite our lack of indepth understanding of the motivations of powerful leaders, Robert Jervis ably reminds us that international disaster is often traceable to decision-makers' perceptions of their environments.²³

Decision-making analysis is useful in the study of war termination because it allows us to understand how the biases and tendencies of key leaders influence policy making. In World War II, it was the perceptions of key Allied leaders concerning their Japanese and German adversaries which drove the desire to accept nothing but unconditional surrender.²⁴

Clearly the decision-making process itself an important explanatory variable. Such factors as perception and misperception, cognitive limitations on rationality and the impact of judgmental biases and heuristics in the decision-making process become important for understanding the role of the key decision-maker in the larger process of ending a war. But while a decision-making analysis uncovers important

²² For an introduction to operational code studies, see Alexander George "The 'Operational Code': A Neglected Approach to the Study of Political Leaders and Decision-Making," International Studies Quarterly 13 (June 1969): 190-222.

²³ Robert Jervis, Perception and Misperception In International Politics (Princeton: University Press, 1976), p. 14.

²⁴ Kecskemeti, Op. Cit., p. 5.

variables, these variables only account for a part of the explanation for the endings of asymmetrical limited wars.

Each of the above approaches to war termination offers interesting and useful contributions to the field; none, however, offers adequate understanding of the process by which large, powerful nations end their small, limited wars. Structural hypotheses suggest external conditions which favor the termination of a war or lead to its continued prosecution, but the type of explanation they offer through exclusive consideration of systemic factors brings us no closer to answers to the original questions of this study. Similarly, though important factors such as the signalling, bargaining and negotiation between nations at war, the progress of the war, and the reciprocal relationship between the negotiating table and the battlefield are revealed through an analysis of the strategic interaction between belligerents, we are still without an explanation of how and why certain strategies were adopted and how interaction informs the character and timing of subsequent decisions. Though national decisions and actions clearly influence strategic interaction outcomes, unless we approach the question from a different perspective, the sources of those decisions remain obscure.

Part of the difficulty with these approaches to war termination stems from the assumption of the state as a 'rational unitary actor.' While this assumption might be useful for systemic or strategic interaction studies, again,

it is a major obstacle to finding clear answers to the questions of concern here.²⁵ To understand how a nation's leadership arrives at decisions regarding war termination, we cannot assume that the nation acts as if it were a 'rational unitary actor.' Rather than unitary, the nation is a collection of many and varied actors, groups and institutions whose relationships are interconnected by complex processes; rather than 'rational' (the best choice among a range of alternatives), policy decisions reflect compromises among the various groups, and often the bases for these compromises are only remotely connected to the substantive issues to which they are addressed. To understand how a nation attempts to extricate itself from armed conflict we must focus on the sources of national decisions, and to do this, we turn our attention to domestic politics.

25 Further, there is a risk that, in considering the nation as a single 'rational unitary actor' one might consider decisions regarding war termination similarly aggregated. But this obscures the true nature of the war termination process. Efforts to end a war involve countless decisions. Any decision short of the immediate cessation of hostilities which results in the resolution of contentious issues, involves some recalculation of the utilities of various goals, and provides the basis for future decisions. Prolongation of the war and the war termination process invariably results. In other words, a nation confronts a choice situation throughout the conduct of the war and any negotiations which might be in progress: to end the war as the situation stands or not. If not, what to do? Escalate? Negotiate? If negotiate, should we alter the terms for settlement? Alter our negotiating strategies and tactics? etc. War termination involves a series of such decisions. The final decision itself to accept whatever status quo prevails as the end of the war is, in effect, the last decision of the sequence.

Domestic Politics

The analytical perspective of domestic politics seems the most efficacious, under certain conditions, for understanding a nation's major decisions regarding the termination of an asymmetrical limited war and, once having arrived at that decision, how policy decisions are implemented to bring about that end. What are these conditions? The first concerns the existence of an opportunity for domestic politics to 'matter' in war termination. A limited war of relatively long duration, not characterized by decisive military successes despite considerable expenditure of resources and appearing insoluble through exclusively military means, presents an extended opportunity for domestic political factors to exercise influence in the war termination process.

A second condition presents an increased incentive for those domestic factors to take advantage of that opportunity. In societies involved in a prolonged war, the percentage of society participating in the war increases, and as the number of those directly involved increases, the number of those indirectly involved similarly grows. As the war drags on, the death toll rises and the costs of continued fighting increases. These factors combine to raise both general and specific interests regarding how and when the war will end. The instance of a large, powerful nation engaged in an asymmetrical limited war, captures both of these conditions.

The use of domestic politics in this study of war termination finds its roots in pluralist notions of domestic politics.²⁶ National goals are seen not as the exclusive aims of the elite leadership, but rather as the product which results when many groups with complex goals compete among themselves for some measure of satisfaction.²⁷ The policy-making process functions in a similar fashion. Policy decisions do not simply emerge from the deliberations of a select group of elite decision-makers. They represent, instead, political products. They are compromise courses of action, emerging from the pushing and pulling among the various domestic groups and their interests. The extent to which one or another domestic element successfully exerts dominant influence in the policy making process has important

26 Classics of pluralist thought include Arthur F. Bentley, The Process of Government [1908], Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967; David B. Truman, The Governmental Process, 2nd. ed. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1971); and Mancur Olson, The Logic of Collective Action: Public Goods and the Theory of Groups (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1965).

27 The derivation of organizational goals is consistent with the neo-classical school of organization theory characterized by the work of Herbert A. Simon, James G. March, Richard M. Cyert and Johan P. Olson, particularly as developed by Cyert and March in "A Behavioral Theory of Organizational Objectives," in Modern Organization Theory, Mason Haire, ed. (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1959): 76-90.

implications for the shape and direction of war termination efforts.²⁸

One considered essay on war termination observes that domestic politics affects all aspects of ending the war, including the formulation (and modification) of war objectives, the conduct of the war itself and the negotiation process to conclude the war.²⁹ Domestic factors combine to influence whether or not the original objectives of the war are maintained over the course of the war, what are, or are not, acceptable methods of warfare, what constitutes battlefield success, whether to engage in negotiations at a point short of clear victory, and even whether to continue the war effort despite its prospects for success or failure.

Public pressure to prolong a war, stemming from desires to recoup some return from the 'sunk costs' of the war, or pressure to terminate, stemming from general 'war weariness', derive their explanation largely from the domestic context. The actual process of ending a war can inspire violent

²⁸ This is not the first effort to understand war termination from a domestic politics viewpoint, but the current effort seeks to establish the relationship between domestic politics and war termination in a more comprehensive and theoretical way. Of the earlier work, see the articles by Halperin, Randle and Rothstein in The Annals, and chapters 4 and 5 in Iklé's Every War Must End. Additionally, there is a large body of literature which deals with the influence of particular domestic factors on foreign-policy, and general observations from these studies are noted throughout the following chapter for their relevancy to the present discussion.

²⁹ Iklé, Every War Must End, p. 84.

reaction from those who believe that the war might end prematurely on terms which do not justify the sacrifices made. Indeed, in the case of Vietnam there was opposition to the Paris peace talks on the grounds that the costs invested in the war deserved better than a pleaded peace with an unworthy opponent.

Motivated by other reasons, pressure can mount within a society in favor of an end to a long, inconclusive war even with the original war objectives only partially achieved or entirely unfulfilled. This pressure stems from a growing sense that the original objectives are not worth continued sacrifice or that things are going badly and the time has come to cut losses. When a breakthrough in the Paris talks appeared imminent, this sort of pressure was exerted on the Nixon administration by members of Congress, particularly when that settlement appeared to be jeopardized by what was perceived to be unreasonable intransigence on the part of the South Vietnamese to the various schemes of settlement so laboriously arrived at by Washington and Hanoi.

The object of a domestic politics analysis is to expose the various institutional forces which influence decision-making, and explicate the effects of various institutional pressures on the key decision-makers. The following chapter elaborates an institutional view of domestic politics in order to illuminate the competing domestic political forces which decisively influence the termination of an asymmetrical limited war.

Chapter 2

Domestic Politics: An Institutional Approach

Earlier pages offered a discussion of the general process of war termination and suggested the limitations of systemic and certain sub-systemic approaches to the subject. For the termination of asymmetrical limited wars, domestic politics provide the best accounting of the timing, sequencing, and character of important decisions involved in that process. The task of contrasting structural and domestic politics explanations for these important decisions to demonstrate the superiority of the latter remains the most important obligation of this study. It is impossible to undertake this central task, however, in advance of elaborating the concept of 'domestic politics' as it will be used throughout this work.

The institutional conceptualization of domestic politics presented here relies, in part, on newer scholarship on political institutions, and focuses on the organizational bases of policy making.¹ It argues that, in certain

¹ See, for example, James G. March and Johan P. Olson, "The New Institutionalism: Organizational Factors in Political Life," American Political Science Review 78 (September 1984): 734-749, and Oliver E. Williamson, The Economic Institutions of Capitalism (New York: Macmillan, 1985). For a treatment of institutionalism as applied to the Presidency, see, Terry Moe, "The Politicized Presidency," The New Direction in American Politics, edited by John E. Chubb

situations such as the termination of asymmetrical limited war, policy is, in effect, the political outcome of complex relationships among various domestic political institutions that do not all share similar interests. An institutional view of domestic politics reveals how organizational relationships within government shape policy. In presenting this institutional perspective, this chapter suggests that the domestic political imperative of policy legitimation within a nation accounts, in an important way, for the 'lag time' between the point where a national leadership decides to end a war, and the point where those wishes become reality.

The asymmetrical limited wars fought over the past forty years have revealed a suggestive pattern: consensus slowly forms among the national leadership that the war must end, and a period of time exists between the forming of that consensus and the achievement of war termination. It is during this period, or 'lag,' that one observes patterns of decisions which reflect the leadership's efforts to bring about an end to the war. During this time, domestic political factors gain primacy among all other variables that influence decision-making, such as negotiations, progress on the battlefield and other international pressures. Throughout this period, the leadership struggles to maintain

and Paul E. Peterson. Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 1987: 235-271.

domestic support both for the decision to end the war and for the policies they have chosen to do so. Although other factors, such as anxiety over the nation's reputation in the international community, do influence decision makers ending a war, the argument here is that domestic politics represents a primary shaper of the war termination effort.

In terminating an asymmetrical limited war, legitimating policy decisions for the domestic audience confronts the leadership as a difficult but necessary aspect of politics in a society where consensus building is essential to governance.² Legitimation is sustained when the President succeeds in convincing enough members of his administration, Congress and the public that his policy goals are worthwhile, and that the means he has chosen to implement that policy will work.³ But because the efforts of the leadership are constrained by strong institutional interests and pressures from other significant domestic groups, I argue that leaders maintain policy legitimacy, not only by forging supportive coalitions insofar as possible, but also, and more usually,

² See George, "Domestic Constraints on Regime Change in U.S. Foreign Policy: The Need for Policy Legitimacy" in Change in the International System, Ole R. Holsti, Randolph M. Siverson and Alexander L. George, eds. (Boulder: Westview Press, 1980): 233-262.

³ Observing this, George notes: "Thus, policy legitimacy has both a normative-moral component and a cognitive basis. The normative component establishes the desirability of the policy; the cognitive component its feasibility." George, "Domestic Constraints on U.S. Foreign Policy," p. 235, emphasis original.

through avoiding the formation of empowered domestic opposition through complicated political maneuvering.

The decision-making process in terminating an asymmetrical limited war provides a focus for the task of demonstrating this claim. War termination consists of a few significant policy decisions which establish the general direction and character of many lesser ones. Examples of such major decisions include the decision itself to end the war, the choice of the principal means to bring that end about, and recognition that the time is right to conclude a peace. Having chosen termination, the decision-makers fix the direction that all subsequent implementation decisions will follow. The implementation decisions make up an important part of the leadership's effort to sustain legitimacy for its policy to end the war.⁴ Because decision-makers work so hard to sustain legitimacy it becomes difficult for leaders to

⁴ A specific policy stance becomes then, to a degree, self-legitimizing, since a decision made has much more force than a candidate decision. That the war will end, rather than continue (at a higher level of intensity perhaps), shifts the administration's effort toward finding an acceptable form for that ending to take. Thus for example, Johnson's move in Spring 1968 to de-escalate channeled subsequent decisions in that direction and established a pattern of decision-making which persisted to the end of his administration. The decisions that initiate such patterns and the patterns themselves which emerge from those decisions are the focus of the present study. It is argued here that these patterns represent not only efforts to implement the major decisions, but efforts to legitimate them within the domestic political context as well.

drastically change their policy without adverse political repercussions.

The politics of decision-making involved with terminating an asymmetrical limited war runs high and therefore considerable domestic controversy invariably attends the process. Thus when we observe policies which appear to disregard the systemic imperatives of the conflict situation, as is often the case in asymmetrical limited wars, the explanation lies in the domestic sphere. For example, what structural reasons exist for a nation's leadership to choose to de-escalate its military commitment despite a battlefield advantage (or stalemate)? Similarly, what would induce a nation to accept the terms of a negotiated settlement which do not reflect those which might otherwise be obtained through the application of its clear military superiority? How do these choices reflect a state's efforts to maximize its power? Safeguard its security? Preserve its international reputation as a great power? These behaviors, observable in the example of the United States ending its involvement in the Vietnam war, defy structural/systemic explanation. A domestic politics analysis provides a much better basis from which to gain an insight into the shape of the entire war termination effort, despite structural

conditions which might demand alternative action from a state.⁵

For the purposes of this study, three major Presidential decisions provide benchmarks for tracing the end of the United States' involvement in Vietnam: the Spring 1968 decision by Lyndon Johnson to de-escalate the conflict; the choice in the Spring 1969 by the newly-elected Nixon administration to adopt a complex strategy to end the war through 'Vietnamization', withdrawal American troops and efforts to secure a negotiated settlement; and the January 1973 decision to accept the terms of a formal peace treaty.⁶

Why focus on Presidential decisions? In this country, as a result of Constitutional provision, judicial review and governmental convention, the center of foreign policy decision-making, and therefore the center of war termination

⁵ Leslie Gelb and Richard Betts observed patterns of Presidential decision-making during the Vietnam War that reflected Presidential response to various domestic pressures. They note, for example that "Presidential responses to these [civilian advisers] pressures followed two patterns: from 1949 through the spring of 1965, doing what was minimally necessary not to lose; and from the summer of 1965 until March 1968, doing the maximum feasible to win..." The Irony of Vietnam: The System Worked (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 1979), p. 278.

⁶ Johnson's decision in 1965 to increase the U.S. combat role in Vietnam though clearly a major decision in the war, is not considered in this study of war termination because it set a 'war fighting' pattern of decision-making. The point at which the Presidential decision pattern changes from 'war fighting' to 'war ending' marks the beginning of the war termination process. Thus Johnson's de-escalation decision of 1968 began the process of war termination in Vietnam.

decision-making, lies in the Executive Branch of government, specifically in the office of the President. Congress, the media, the general public, the federal bureaucracy, the military and high-level advisers attempt to influence Presidential decision-making. As none of these entities can issue policy decisions per se (although they can more or less severely constrain them), however, we seek to understand how the various influences significantly affect the President, who can, and who is, in all his dealings, fundamentally politically motivated.

This institutional approach to domestic politics differs from other domestic or bureaucratic politics studies in two important respects.⁷ First, 'bureaucratic politics' refers to essentially the agencies and people who comprise the bureaucracy of the Executive Branch. The by-now classic notion of 'where one stands depends upon where one sits' suggests that, for example, the Secretary of State differs from the Secretary of Defense on certain policy issues because the interests of the Departments of State and Defense simply differ in those areas. This coarse association of organizational goals with policy positions does not reveal the complex organizational bases for differences between

⁷ Graham T. Allison's Essence of Decision (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1971), and Morton Halperin's Bureaucratic Politics and Foreign Policy (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 1974) provide the basis for the distinctions drawn.

bureaucratic departments. Further, this model does not inform us, in any sophisticated way, of the conditions under which either the Secretary of State or Defense exercises greater influence in the policy process, save for the favor of the President. The present institutional conception of domestic politics suggests that external conditions---such as the nation's involvement in an asymmetrical limited war---and internal conditions---such as the prospect of national elections---importantly determine which advice the President is disposed toward.

The present work also differs from the often used domestic politics approach that expands the cast of actors provided in the bureaucratic politics model to include other governmental actors such as Congress or non-governmental actors such as the public and the media. Though illuminating more actors relevant to policy making, this approach leaves the nature and means of their relevancy obscure. The institutional perspective presented here, while acknowledging the important contribution of these approaches, goes beyond the earlier work to indicate the strength and direction of political relationships, forcing us to broaden our concept of 'domestic politics.'

This institutional analysis of domestic politics also differs from other organizational approaches to politics. Organizational analysis based on classical, human relations or neo-classical notions focus on the organization as the unit of analysis and essentially look 'inward' toward the

organization. That is, they consider the organizational unit essentially in isolation, focusing on its elements, structures and routines to understand such things as goals and authority relationships.⁸ An institutional approach, on the other hand, is both 'inward' and 'outward looking.' This perspective considers not only the sub-groups and routines within organizations, but also how that organization operates within a larger environment. For such governmental organizations as Congress, the Presidency, or the federal bureaucracy, the salient environment is not simply the polity which they govern, but also the other organizations and institutions with which that governance is shared---the other organizations which share the same interests and definitions

⁸ It is obviously beyond the scope of the present work to consider each of these schools of organization thought in detail. A number of volumes present the arguments in a useful comparative format. Among them: Charles Perrow, Complex Organizations: A Critical Essay, 3rd edition (New York: Random House, 1986); Jeffrey Pfeffer, Organizations and Organization Theory, (Cambridge: Ballinger Publishing Company, 1982); D.S. Pugh, ed. Organization Theory, 2nd edition (New York: Viking, 1984); W. Richard Scott, Organizations: Rational, Natural and Open Systems, 2nd edition (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1987; and Jay M. Shafritz and J. Steven Ott, Classics of Organization Theory, 2nd edition (Chicago: Dorsey Press, 1987). For a theoretical discussion of groups, their mobilization, action and significance in government, see Arthur F. Bentley, The Process of Government [1908], (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967); David B. Truman, The Governmental Process, 2nd ed. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1971); and Mancur Olson, The Logic of Collective Action (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1965).

of reality and power.⁹ The institutionalist looks at Congress, for example, as it relates to the public it is designed to serve, and as it relates to the Presidency, the federal bureaucracy, or the courts in the discharge of its responsibilities.

An institutional perspective also suggests that organizations acquire a dynamic, or inner logic, quite separate from the direction of the organization's leadership. Organizations are complex entities, and to maintain that their leadership exerts primary influence over all its

⁹ This argument is consistent with the view of Charles Perrow who challenges current institutional work for its lack of specificity in defining the environment with which the organization interacts. It is his opinion that current scholarship too often takes the larger society as the 'environment' when, in fact, the whole group of organizations similar to the type under study is perhaps more appropriate. He challenges institutional treatments which fail to consider the inter-active relationship of organizations and their environments. Organizations are not merely created and molded by the environment in which they are found; they, in turn, create and mold the their environment.

The specification of the salient environments influencing (and influenced by) organizational behavior is an important element of the current argument. The institutions of government in this country are relatively stable. Though aspects of their internal configuration change, their goals remain largely intact, though they too may change gradually over time. Powerful governmental institutions do not experience the goal displacement that characterizes smaller or less powerful organizations which are far more sensitive to internal and external processes which can cause organizational drift or eventual disintegration. This is because governmental institutions are able to "institutionalize on their own terms," creating, to an extent, "the environments they desire, shape existing ones, and define which sections of it they will deal with" as Perrow argues that the large and powerful dominant private sector institutions do. See Perrow, Complex Organizations, pp. 173-176.

activities all of the time veils this complexity.¹⁰ Changes in either the organizational mandate or the control structure which do not appear to be imposed or negotiated by the leader, offer clues to why organizations persist long after their founding purpose disappears, and suggest that organizational dynamics also influence the process of policy formulation.¹¹

What does an institutional perspective of domestic politics disclose about the motivations and ways in which Congress, the public, the media, the military, the bureaucracy, and the President's 'inner-circle' advisers influence Presidential decision-making in the termination of an asymmetrical limited war? Each of these groups has specific expectations, broadly defined to include issue demands and preferences for their implementation, regarding whether and how the war ends, and

¹⁰ The notion of organizational dynamic and momentum influencing goal formulation differs from the view is advanced particularly by the classical organization theory school. This body of scholarship, characterized by the writing of Fayol, Taylor, Weber and Gulick, advances a strong-leader role in organizational goal formulation and modification. The relevant articles of these authors appear in the Pugh and Shafritz and Ott volumes noted above.

¹¹ The Military Assistance Advisory Group (MAAG) provides an example of organizational persistence. Established in the early phases of U.S. involvement in Vietnam, the MAAG oversaw the relatively modest U.S. advisory operation. By 1962 when it became clear that the nature and scope of the U.S. commitment would broaden significantly, the MAAG was, rather than disestablished, incorporated into the newly established Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (MACV), with modified duties. Shelby L. Stanton, Vietnam Order of Battle (Washington, D.C.: U.S. News Books, 1981), p. 59.

each has various means to make those preferences 'matter' to the President.

To examine how institutional relationships within government shape major decisions in war termination--- decisions which often counter the external demands of the situation, let us look at the interests of these domestic groups and the means at their disposal to convert interests and expectations regarding war termination into pressures on the President. In the process, we will consider how, given certain systemic and strategic considerations, the institutional relationship among the various domestic political factors might enhance the ability of one or another of these factors to influence war termination decision-making.

The Military

Militaries wage war; but what role does the military play in concluding an asymmetrical limited war? How do military considerations factor into war termination decision-making? What interests do the military have in this process? By what means can they make these interests significant to the President?

To understand how military considerations can influence war termination decision-making, one must consider a nation's expectations regarding its success in a limited conflict, and the role and performance of the military over the course of the entire war. Nations do not start or fight wars to end

them; they fight to win. This association of conclusion with victory, however ill-defined or vaguely understood, suggests that the military will have a good deal of policy influence in the early phases of a war. Expectations of victory also suggest that the military's interests in war termination will be tempered by its perception of its role as the agent through which victory is achieved. The means of warfare lie essentially in the hands of soldiers, and soldiers plan for war. For the military, ending the war means winning it. And, as the first chapter of this work noted, one achieves military victory by relieving one's opponent of his immediate and potential ability to make war. Establishing the political significance of this victory, particularly in limited war, remains the difficult task of the nation's leadership and politicians.

Military considerations play an important part at any time in war, but the opening stages of a conflict present military advisers a particular opportunity to play a leading role in the policy process. The choice of war implies that decision-makers will not only be more disposed to military advice, they might become less receptive to suggestions for resolving the dispute from groups not related to the immediate prosecution of the war. Choosing one strategy to deal with a problem, i.e. going to war, implies rejection, to a degree of other strategies. Thus, for example, Lyndon Johnson's decision in 1965 to increase the level of U.S. combat activity in Vietnam reflected a growing consensus among the

leadership that the North Vietnamese could only be dissuaded from their designs on the South through force. The choice of the military option all but foreclosed extended consideration of alternatives over the next several months.¹²

Once a war begins then, calls for ending the conflict or pursuing alternative means for settlement, though often present, find little support in the dynamic unfolding of events. Early in war, the military commitment tends to escalate, and the pattern of decision-making that emerges to support this escalation reinforces the choice of war, and the significance of the military in the policy process.

In these early stages, the civilian leadership also anticipates an end to the war through military victory. Having linked their political fate to war, the leadership depends upon the military to achieve success and, quite obviously in the process, bring the war to an end. Battlefield successes reinforce this dependence on the military, and the status of the military in the policy process remains high, their influence strong.

One is cautioned, however, not to see the relationship between the military and the civilian leadership quite so simplistically. To speak of the 'military's interests' in

¹² The alternatives to force appeared to be two: develop a strong and stable government in South Vietnam responsible for and capable of its own defense, or negotiate a solution. The Administration held bleak prospects for both. Gelb and Betts, Op. Cit., pp. 110-116.

war termination suggests unified and consistent military interests when in fact there are at least three principal military groups with different interests in how a war ends: the field commander, the individual services and the general staff.¹³ The field commander, committed to the primacy of his theater of operations, tends to have a stubborn, if not also optimistic, view of the possibility of military victory even long after others, both civilian and military, have given up. Each individual military service, concerned with its own autonomy and growth, tends to have a wider view of war termination, trying to anticipate the long term effects of a particular type of settlement on its future role. And by virtue of its position in the hierarchy and multi-service constitution, the general staff is more sensitive to the domestic and foreign policy implications of military actions and functions often as buffer between civilian decision-makers and military field commanders. The experience of Vietnam revealed that 'military interests' were neither consistent across nor within services, varied over time and often emerged as a result of political battles both within

¹³ This point is convincingly made by Morton Halperin in "War Termination as a Problem in Civil-Military Relations," Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science 392 (November 1970): 86-95.

the Department of Defense and between DoD and other executive agencies.¹⁴

Time and poor progress on the battlefield work to cripple the effectiveness of military advisers.¹⁵ Prospects for a rapid victory wane as a war progresses, and faith in the military diminishes as mediocre results mount, forcing the realization that military means will not bring hostilities to a decisive conclusion. A long, protracted war, or one going poorly, can precipitate consensus forming among the nation's leadership that the war should be ended before their military force is exhausted or decisively defeated.

A nation faced with setbacks can chose to escalate its commitment in the conflict, or if there is reasonable expectation that the enemy's fortune's will decline, simply hold out until that occurs.¹⁶ But in some conflicts, the

¹⁴ For a masterful treatment of the how the Army's performance in Vietnam reflected strong institutional biases, see Andrew F. Krepinevich, The Army and Vietnam (Baltimore: Johns-Hopkins Press 1986).

¹⁵ Though indeed, scenarios can be envisaged in which time and poor performance combined to increase military influence, though in a way and with results which lie outside the scope of the present work. I have in mind those situations in which reaction to the poor performance of the military comes from within the military itself---from a group of disaffected officers, for example---and this group takes action to usurp authority in the country via a military coup. In this hypothetical case, poor military performance does not result in diminished military influence but asserted military dominance.

¹⁶ Michael Handel has suggested that expectations play an important role in war termination. The perception that one's

realization sets in that an end to the war cannot be brought about through exclusively military means or that the war cannot be won at a price and level of commitment acceptable to the decision-makers. When decision-makers become convinced that there is no military solution to the conflict they begin to search for alternatives. This in fact occurred in the Spring of 1968 when Johnson and his advisers realized that the U.S. could not defeat North Vietnam without a sizeable---and ultimately unacceptable---increase in the level of U.S. combat power.¹⁷

'War ending' as opposed to 'war fighting' thinking slowly emerges to establish a new pattern of decision-making. The military is faced with the harsh reality that the responsibility for bringing an end to the war has, in effect, been taken out of their hands. The line between military and civilian affairs which often seems clear at the outbreak of war becomes blurred, and the military finds that not only has it lost the ability to decisively influence national policy, it begins to lose the ability to determine even the most

own fortunes are on the rise, or one's opponent's are declining, will induce a belligerent to postpone the ending of a war, through the expectation that a more favorable outcome is possible. "War Termination: A Critical Survey," Jerusalem Papers on Peace Problems, pp. 34-36.

¹⁷ See The Pentagon Papers, Senator Gravel edition, 4 volumes (Boston: Beacon Press, 1971), volume IV, pp. 250, 266-271, 563-4. For an analysis of this realization see Gelb and Betts, Op. Cit., pp. 175-8.

technical aspects of waging war it regards as within its exclusive competence.

Presidential Advisers

The forces which have served to convince decision-makers that a military solution is not possible or not worth added costs have acted in similar ways on other domestic political factors. Pressures mount for a change in policy. Those closest to the President have the opportunity for the most immediate impact. Among the inner circle of Presidential advisers, those long standing skeptics, or those who only slowly lost their enthusiasm for the war, often seize the opportunity to make the earliest and often most meaningful calls for change.¹⁸

¹⁸ There is quite an extensive literature on the relationship between the President and his advisers. See, for example, Patrick Anderson, The President's Men (New York: Doubleday, 1969); Joseph G. Bock, The White House Staff and the National Security Assistant (New York: Greenwood Press, 1987); Thomas E. Cronin and Sanford D. Greenberg, The Presidential Advisory System (New York: Harper and Row, 1969); Anthony Downs, Inside Bureaucracy (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1967), especially chapters 8 and 9; Richard F. Fenno, The President's Cabinet (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1959); Alexander L. George, Presidential Decisionmaking in Foreign Policy (Boulder: Westview Press, 1980), especially chapter 4; Hugh Heclo, A Government of Strangers, (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 1977), pp. 36-55; Walter Isaacson and Evan Thomas, The Wise Men (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1986); Irving L. Janis, Victims of Groupthink (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1972); Richard Tanner Johnson, Managing the White House (New York: Harper and Row, 1974); and Theodore Sorensen, Decision-Making in the White House (New York: Columbia University Press, 1963)

As noted earlier, the decision for war commits a leadership to particular strategies, and the steps taken to legitimize that choice further constrain their ability to dramatically alter the policy course. Advisers who strongly supported the decision to go to war, having linked themselves so completely with that policy option, are reluctant to counsel change. Everyone is expected to 'get on board' and concentrate on implementation; discord is discouraged or 'institutionalized.' During the Johnson administration, George Ball assumed the role of 'resident critic' as much through his own conviction that the the President's policies were wrongheaded, as through Johnson's desire that he hear opposing views. On the other hand, Maxwell Taylor, U.S. Ambassador to South Vietnam during the period of initial escalation, was expected to support the decision to increase the ground commitment. His opposition, which persisted beyond the point at which American troops were introduced in Vietnam in substantial number, was not appreciated, and indeed the subject of intense pressure by White House aides to change.¹⁹

Policy making is a relatively slow and incremental process, and Presidential advisers, through their close involvement in policy making frequently see the adverse effects that a

¹⁹ Pentagon Papers, III, pp. 97-103. See also Maxwell Taylor, Swords And Plowshares (New York: W.W. Norton, 1972) p. 375.

policy can have long before others. Objections might first focus on the tactics chosen to implement a policy, and only later, as the ranks of the disaffected swell and their position secured through the tacit legitimacy of numbers, do the policy objectives themselves come under fire. The 'loss' of advisers can be particularly poignant for the President, especially if the disaffected advisers had been strong supporters previously. Johnson's stunned reaction to the change in the Senior Informal Advisory Group's recommendation on Vietnam with their call in 1968 for de-escalation illustrates the impact that the change in adviser support can have.²⁰

The General Public and the Role of Public Opinion

The role and significance of public opinion in policy making has received quite a bit of scholarly attention.²¹ Within that literature, it is generally agreed that the

²⁰ See Isaacson and Thomas, The Wise Men, pp. 702-3. The change in the counsel of the 'Wise Men' is discussed in the following chapter.

²¹ For a sampling of treatments of the public's influence in the foreign policy-making process, see Gabriel Almond, The American People and Foreign Policy (New York: Praeger, 1960); Bernard C. Cohen, The Public's Impact on Foreign Policy (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1973); Barry B. Hughes, The Domestic Context of American Foreign Policy (San Francisco: W.H. Freeman and Company, 1978); Ralph B. Levering, The Public and American Foreign Policy: 1918-1978 (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1978); John Mueller, War, Presidents and Public Opinion (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1973); and James N. Rosenau, Public Opinion and Foreign Policy (New York: Random House, 1961).

public is largely unaware and generally uninformed on foreign policy issues. Nevertheless, the termination of an asymmetrical limited war presents the opportunity for an enhanced role and significance in the decision-making process for the general public.

At the outset of a war the general public tends to mobilize in support of the war effort. Known as the 'rally effect', this support occurs because citizens tend to believe that their leaders are responding to a national threat and that unity, not divisiveness, is needed at this time. The onset of crisis conveys tacit legitimacy to the leadership's actions. There is an implicit assumption on the part of the general public that decision-makers have more information regarding the threatening situation and that their response--the war---is appropriate. National leaders attempt to capitalize on this legitimacy for as long as possible and rely on battlefield successes, among other things, to maintain public support for their policies.

The President also strives to maintain public support through such techniques as calling for continued sacrifice to justify sacrifices already made. Leaders recognize that wars, once begun, tend to continue, and continued fighting is always at continued cost. They seek ways to justify the commitment, knowing that the nation can ill-afford to write off the 'sunk costs' of a war. When success on the battlefield characterizes the early stages of a war there is less a feeling of senseless loss than there is of unfortunate

but necessary cost. Success justifies the past costs and demands continued effort. Even if there has been little or no positive military achievements, however, the expectation that success is not far off persists among segments of the population, particularly those whose war experience has been favorable, i.e. resulted in victory. In the United States, many recalled the glorious successes of World War II and refused to believe any different outcome was possible in Indochina.

Feelings which underlie early public support for a war, and persist into the period when a leadership has decided that the war must end, represent an obstacle for decision-makers and can operate to prevent a war from ending. Though difficult to fix the degree to which sentiment of this type might be influential, it is not unreasonable to suggest that Presidential efforts to accommodate these feelings can result in additional, and perhaps to some unnecessary, war death and property destruction. To have executed a rapid withdrawal in the early years of the Nixon administration would have been, to many, tantamount to an admission of defeat. The Vietnamization program provided the administration a 'decent interval' to placate sentiments, but obviously at the price of an additional loss of American lives.

For a nation such as the United States, the nature of the interaction between the public and politics imposes two demands on policy makers: that their efforts yield successful

results, and that those results be achieved with some speed.²² A lack of military success, combined with perceptions of an apparently interminable war, raise the public's war termination 'consciousness.' Battlefield failures precipitate a decline in expectations for future success, and public support for a war effort wanes similarly. Feelings of 'war weariness' begin to rise as casualties and other costs of continuing the war mount. But the decline in public support will not necessarily mean an increase in active opposition unless there are one or more opposition groups to mobilize the masses and give political expression to their discontent.

The general public represents the domestic group least well equipped to convert its expectations regarding the ending of a war into immediate and tangible pressures compelling Presidential action. Other domestic groups can provide that function. Advisers who have become disenchanted with the war often provide the important focus and direction for the public's unhappiness with the war effort use public opinion as a tool to bolster their positions in policy debates within the White House. Congress and the press provide official and unofficial fora for the expression of public sentiment and use the shifting public mood to augment pressure they might bring to bear for alternative policy preferences.

²² George, "Domestic Constraints on Regime Change," p. 259.

The impact of public opinion will not only depend on its skillful handling by one or another major actor, but on the increased susceptibility of decision-makers to its significance. Political processes, such as elections, are means by which that can occur.

If opinion polls serve as the most frequent index of public sentiment, voting results remain the most important. For the nation's leadership, elections serve as the principal means by which they are made responsive to the general public. The possibility of electoral punishment or the prospect of electoral reward suggest a more significant role for public opinion in Presidential election years and, if less in mid-term election years, still greater than in years without national elections. To ensure the success of their policies and their own political future, politicians must convert the ephemeral and amorphous public opinion into votes. The impact of the electoral cycle on the termination of an asymmetrical limited war, particularly if that war has become decidedly unpopular, is undeniable.

Questions which surround voting have preoccupied scholars for a number of years.²³ Who votes? Why do people vote? Why

²³ The interested reader should consult the following sources which sketch the development of voting theory: Paul Lazarsfeld, Bernard Berelson, and Helen Gaudet, The People's Choice (New York: Columbia University Press, 1944); Angus Campbell, Phillip E. Converse, Warren E. Miller, and Donald E. Stokes, The American Voter (New York: Wiley and Sons, 1960); Anthony Downs, An Economic Theory of Democracy (New York: Harper and Row, 1957); V.O. Key, Jr., The Responsible

do people vote the way they do? This last question is most relevant to our concerns here. Which factor most influences the individual vote decision: one's political party affiliation, the reputation of the candidates, or the issues? Predicting the vote is extraordinarily difficult though important for a President trying to sustain legitimacy for his war termination policies while at the same time guarantee himself or his party re-election. Sustaining policy legitimation in the delicate process of ending a war, particularly if extended over some time, means that the President's political future hangs on his ability to manipulate the complexities of the vote to his advantage.

The Media

In this country, particularly since the Second World War, the role of the elite media as the 'eyes and ears' of the public in Washington has grown enormously.²⁴ The press has

Electorate (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1966); Benjamin I. Page and Richard A. Brody, "Policy Voting and the Electoral Process: The Vietnam War Issue," American Political Science Review 66 (1972): 979-95; Morris P. Fiorina, Retrospective Voting in American National Elections (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981); and Norman H. Nie, Sidney Verba and John R. Petrocik, The Changing American Voter (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976).

²⁴ In the United States, the 'elite media,' or press, refers to the three major television networks, the principal daily newspapers with national circulations, such as The New York Times and Washington Post, and the major current affairs magazines Time and Newsweek. For a discussion of the role and impact of the press in the foreign policy making process

carved for itself a political role with the implied position that it is at least as representative of the general public as Congress or the Presidency. Indeed, some have observed that the media has supplanted the political party system in important functions such as 'policing' the ranks of potential candidates, providing general and specific political education to the public and performing the service of encouraging people to vote.²⁵

Subtly intertwined with the policy making process, the media often casts existing policy disagreements in sharp relief. In situations such as the termination of an asymmetrical limited war where controversy surrounds policy choices and decisions, or even after a course of action has

see Bernard C. Cohen, The Press and Foreign Policy (Princeton: University Press, 1963); Michael Baruch Grossman and Martha Joynt Kumar, Portraying the President: The White House and the News Media (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981), and S. Robert Lichter, Stanley Rothman and Linda S. Lichter, The Media Elite (Bethesda, Maryland: Adler and Adler, 1986). For studies of the press and its coverage of the Vietnam War see Peter Braestrup, Big Story: How the American Press and Television Reported and Interpreted the Crisis of Tet in 1968 in Vietnam and Washington, 2 vols. (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1977); and Kathleen J. Turner, Lyndon Johnson's Dual War: Vietnam and the Press (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985).

²⁵ This argument is presented by Martin Wattenberg in The Decline of American Political Parties (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986). Wattenberg has suggested that political parties have lost political clout in this country because they are no longer crucial to the governmental process. He argues that parties neither convey the necessary electoral advantage they once did, nor possess the capability to effectively penalize uncooperative partisans.

been chosen, the media is a useful tool for marshalling opinion on behalf of one or another initiative, by educating or energizing the public, and giving form and direction to public opinion. Frequently, however, debates over potential courses of action which appear in the media are old news to the top decision-makers. There are many occasions when, by the time policy positions have cohered to the point where public debate is possible, the central decision makers have already concluded their deliberations and arrived at a decision. No one denies, however, that the media has a central role in this nation's politics, and that role is as much a function of institutional demands of the information media as any self-proclaimed public responsibility.

News, scoops and headlines sell newspapers, and the various media compete between and among themselves for larger circulations and wider viewership. This economic reality points to a cyclical relationship between the press, the public and the politicians. A greater share of the market means that a particular newspaper or network reaches more of the national constituency, and the press attempt to capitalize on this fact to gain privileged access, thereby having more scoops and thereby gaining a wider audience. Because a wide segment of the public reads newspapers, and an even wider segment watches television, politicians realize that the media offers useful, and cost saving, ways to reach their constituency. Thus the press gains the access they want; they sell more papers and air time and become ever more

important and powerful in the political process. The power of the press has changed government. It has broadened the ranks of the informed public and it has exposed more of the governmental process to public scrutiny.

The press, however, as a result of its becoming inextricably enmeshed within the processes of government, has itself been transformed. Newsmen are often themselves news, and the press are not infrequently pawns in a larger political game which they do not control. Walter Cronkite's scathing indictment of administration policy in the wake of the Tet Offensive of 1968 sent 'shock waves' through the halls of Washington and had far-ranging repercussions. It signalled many within government that the President's war policies had all but completely lost the support of the American public and change was needed.²⁶

Congress²⁷

As a foreign policy issue with far-ranging domestic repercussions, the problem of ending involvement in a limited

²⁶ This observation of George Christian is cited in William T. Small, To Kill A Messenger (New York: Hasing House, 1970), p. 123.

²⁷ There are a number of treatments of President-Congress relations. See, for example, Louis Fisher, The Constitution Between Friends: Congress, the President and the Law (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1978), and The Politics of Shared Power: Congress and the Executive (Washington D.C.: Congressional Quarterly Press, 1981); Stephen J. Wayne, The Legislative Presidency (New York: Harper and Row, 1978); and George C. Edwards, III, Presidential Influence in Congress (San Francisco: W.H. Freeman and Company, 1980.)

war presents special problems for the legislature. Congress' organizational unsuitability for the task of foreign policy making has resulted in much of that responsibility having been ceded to the Executive. This organizational reality casts Congress largely in a reactive role in foreign policy but has not erased certain institutional bases for extremely significant, if somewhat limited, actions for Congress to take in the policy process.²⁸ Through its power of the purse, its function as a national forum for public debate and, in the extreme, its impeachment authority, Congress has several means by which it can exert pressure on the executive, if the administration's war termination policies appear drastically flawed.²⁹

28 By virtue of its responsibility as the representative branch, Congress has certain internal mechanisms and procedures that reflect the institutionalization of members' interests---the principal one of which is, of course, getting re-elected. One scholar, David Mayhew, has suggested that Congressional structures and procedures reflect this, and further suggests that, since members of Congress owe their allegiance to their constituencies, domestic issues generally receive more attention and Congress is often likely to take the lead here. Congress will manifest those behaviors which serve to maintain the organization and procedures with which it operates. Mayhew's convincing argument that Congressional structures and procedures reflect the principal motivation of Congressmen which is re-election generates the conclusion that re-election concerns militate against a strong and active role for Congress in foreign policy decision making. David R. Mayhew, Congress: The Electoral Connection (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974).

29 Robert Randle offers a discussion of Congress' powers to influence Presidential decision-making in war termination which expands slightly on the three presented here. "The Domestic Origins of Peace," in The Annals, pp. 76-85.

Of all of Congress' powers, it is clear that the power of the purse is its most significant. A President can side-step Congressional debates and inquiries which threaten his policies by charging that they are politically motivated ploys which ultimately work to harm the national interest. The President can also attempt to by-pass Congress completely with appeals for support from the national constituency; a constituency which he alone can claim. But the President has little recourse when Congress withholds funds for a war effort---though in so doing, Congress immediately becomes the President's partner in the problem of terminating the war.

Because of Congress' power of the purse, the President must choose policy options and oversee their implementation with care. If, in the formulation of war termination policies or in the effort to sustain legitimacy for those policies, the President has infringed upon any of the rights and prerogatives of the legislature, Congress will react unfavorably. Indeed, depending on the extent to which the President appears to have overstepped his bounds, not only might his war termination policies be opposed, but other aspects of his political agenda become susceptible to serious challenge. The prospect of this debacle in the extreme makes Presidents particularly attentive to signs of trouble from Congress.³⁰

³⁰ Randle also makes this point, noting that impeachment is, of course, the weapon of ultimate recourse for Congress.

The Presidency

How does the President formulate and discharge policy amid the complex web of domestic political pressures that attend the process of terminating an asymmetrical limited war? To answer this question we must examine the organizational structure of the Presidency, the formal and informal resources of both the office and the incumbent, and the incentives which motivate the President to use the Executive structure and resources to formulate and discharge war termination initiatives.

The organizational structure of the Presidency includes the bureaucratic institutions of the Executive Branch and the formal procedures by which they interact with other governmental agencies and societal groups. Executive resources take in the position and reputation of the President as Chief Executive, senior member of his political party, head of state and Commander-in-Chief. Presidential power is finite and variable.³¹ The limited formal capabilities of the Executive represent a dilemma for the

³¹ Following Neustadt's lead, 'powers' as used here, refers to authority formally granted to the Executive by the Constitution. 'Power' refers to the individual President's ability to accumulate additional influence resources and to exercise these and his 'powers' to accomplish his policy goals. See Richard Neustadt, Presidential Power, (New York: Wiley and Sons, 1960), p. 33, ff. See also Edgar E. Robinson, Alexander De Conde, Raymond G. O'Connor, and Martin B. Travis, Jr., Powers of the President in Foreign Affairs, 1945-1965 (San Francisco: Commonwealth Club of California, 1966); and Erwin C. Hargrove, The Power of the Modern Presidency (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1974).

President who must discharge policy imperatives while accommodating the pressures he perceives from one or another public exerting pressure to end the war. But the capabilities of the President to discharge his duties are not straightforwardly determined. There is, after all, no formal Presidential job description. As Richard Neustadt has pointed out, the President functions as government's clerk-- he does everything not done by someone else.³² The relatively meager formal organizational structure of the Presidency belies this fact, however, and it is with the formal structure of the Executive branch that we begin our examination of the President's role in war termination policy-making.

The Formal Structure of the Presidency

It was no accident that the Founding Fathers were vague about the Constitutional responsibilities of the Executive.³³ Wishing to avoid the excesses of monarchical rule, they

³² Neustadt, Presidential Power, ch. 1.

³³ The sections of the Constitution which pertain directly to the office of the President are: Article II, Sections 1-4 ; the Twelfth Amendment (election of the President), the Twentieth Amendment ('Lame Duck'), the Twenty-Second Amendment (number of Presidential terms), the Twenty-fifth Amendment (Presidential Disability, vacancy in the Vice-Presidency). In addition, of course, there are many useful treatments of the Presidency from a Constitutional perspective. See, for example, Edward S. Corwin, The President: Office and Powers 1787-1957 (New York: New York University Press, 1957); and Louis Fisher, The Politics of Shared Power: Congress and the Executive, especially chapter 1.

desired an office that would discharge the will of the people in conjunction with, and checked by, the legislature and the courts. Over the course of two centuries, it has been the Constitutional provision of executive powers combined with judicial buttressing that has given Presidents a comparatively free hand in the conduct of this nation's foreign affairs.³⁴ The limits of Presidential power in foreign policy-making has been an issue of some controversy since the earliest days of the Republic, and maintaining the fragile consensus within government on this issue is central to the President's task of legitimating war termination policies.

Since Roosevelt, and in the wake of World War II, the formal organization of the Executive Branch has undergone substantial change as a result of confronting a dramatically altered international environment with unprecedented foreign policy demands. Post-war realities have induced Presidential attempts to expand the means with which to discharge the burgeoning responsibilities of the Executive. Congress has played its part, mandating extensive re-organization of the

³⁴ A major Supreme Court decision in 1936 reinforced Presidential practice and Congressional compliance with this arrangement (*United States v. Curtiss-Wright* 299 U.S.). For discussions of Presidential supremacy regarding the formulation of foreign policy see Corwin, The President, especially chapter 5, and Cecil V. Crabb, Jr. and Kevin V. Mulcahy, Presidents and Foreign Policy Making From FDR to Reagan (Baton Rouge, Louisiana: University of Louisiana Press, 1986.)

Executive branch on a number of occasions. Legislated reorganization has accounted for significant alteration in the office of the President since Congress passed the Reorganization Act of 1939. The establishment of the Executive Office of the President, incorporating the Presidential Staff and the Bureau of the Budget, began a trend of increased bureaucratization of government in general, and the Executive in particular.³⁵

These legislative modifications have often served to reinforce interpretations of Constitutional ambiguity on foreign policy in favor of the Presidency. Nearly without exception, the legislative alterations have reflected executive efforts to fix a perceived inability to discharge its policy imperatives. Today, we see in the Presidency an organization which has grown, in slightly over half a century, from just under three dozen individuals to over 2000

³⁵ There have been a number of post-war Presidential and Congressional panels designed to review the operation of the Executive Branch. The more significant of their number include the Hoover Commission appointed in 1947 by Truman, a second Hoover Commission, 1953-1955, the Heineman Task Force, appointed in 1967 by Johnson, and the Ash Committee, appointed in 1970 by Nixon. Invariably these committees called for measures to populate and strengthen the Executive Branch. Among the agencies established through legislative action to deal specifically with foreign policy are the National Security Council, the Department of Defense, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and a number of intelligence organizations including the Central Intelligence Agency and the National Security Agency. For discussions of increased bureaucratization of the Executive Branch, see, Corwin, The President, especially chapter 3; and Harold Seidman and Robert Gilmour, Politics, Position, and Power, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), especially chs. 2 and 3.

with interests in, and responsibilities for, every aspect of government. The foreign-policy apparatus of the Executive accounts for a significant part of this growth. The expansion of the Presidency, however, mirrors all of government. Bureaucratic and Congressional staffs, as well as every other federal agency have expanded in size and complexity, making the President's task of control over even those most immediately answerable to him impossible. Truman's famous musing over Eisenhower's fate captured this acute Presidential handicap completely.³⁶

The Bureaucracy

The foreign policy bureaucracy consists of the President at the logical center, the State Department, the Department of Defense, the National Security Council and Central Intelligence Agency.³⁷ While Congress has organized itself to

³⁶ "'He'll sit here,' Truman would remark (taping his desk for emphasis),' and he'll say, 'Do this! Do that!' And nothing will happen." Quoted in Neustadt, Presidential Power, p. 9 (emphasis original.)

³⁷ There are, of course, extensive literatures which analyze each of these agencies and their relationship with the President. A small sample is cited here. For general works on the bureaucracy of foreign policy see, "The Organization of the Government for the Conduct of Foreign Policy", The Robert D. Murphy Commission Report, 7 vols., (Washington D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1975); Lincoln P. Bloomfield, The Foreign Policy Process: A Modern Primer (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1982); and I.M. Destler, Presidents, Bureaucrats and Foreign Policy: The Politics of Organizational Reform (Princeton: University Press, 1972). For more theoretical treatments, see, Graham T. Allison, Essence of Decision; Anthony Downs, Inside

Bureaucracy; Morton Halperin, Bureaucratic Politics and Foreign Policy; Alexander L. George, "The Case for Multiple Advocacy," [with a comment by I. M. Destler and Rejoinder by A. L. George] in American Political Science Review 66 (September 1972): 751-795; Hugh Heclo, A Government of Strangers, and "OMB and the Presidency--The Problem of Neutral Competence," in The Public Interest 38 (Winter 1975): 80-98; see also Heclo's "Issue Networks and the Executive Establishment," in The New American Political System, edited by Anthony King, (Washington, D.C.: American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research, 1978): 87-124; and John D. Steinbruner, The Cybernetic Theory of Decision: New Dimensions of Political Analysis (Princeton: University Press, 1974).

On the State Department see Dean Acheson, "The Eclipse of the State Department," Foreign Affairs 49 (July 1971): 593-606; John H. Esterline, and Robert B. Black, Inside Foreign Policy: The Department of State Political System and its Subsystems (Palo Alto, California: Mayfield Publishing Company, 1975); and Graham H. Stuart, The Department of State: A History of its Organization, Procedure and Personnel (New York: Macmillan, 1949). On the Department of Defense see Demetrios Caraley, The Politics of Military Unification: A Study of Conflict and the Policy Process (New York: Columbia University Press, 1966); James Clotfelter, The Military in American Politics (New York: Harper and Row, 1973); Alexander L. George, David K. Hall and William R. Simons, The Limits of Coercive Diplomacy (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1971); Lewis J. Edinger, "Military Leaders and Foreign Policy-Making," American Political Science Review 57 (June 1963): 392-405; Robert A. Hanneman, "Military Elites and Political Executives," Journal of Political and Military Sociology 14 (Spring 1986): 75-89. On the National Security Council and the Central Intelligence Agency, in addition to the Bock volume, see Keith C. Clark and Laurence J. Legere, eds., The President and The Management of National Security, (New York: Praeger, 1969), especially pp. 55-115; and I. M. Destler, "National Security Management: What Presidents have Wrought," Political Science Quarterly 95 (1980): 573-588.

The memoirs of Presidents and their key aides are also useful, if carefully interpreted, particularly regarding perceptions of executive-department relations and the ways in

participate in the foreign policy making process with its committees on foreign policy, defense and intelligence in both the House and Senate, it is the executive agencies which represent the means by which the President discharges policy and attempts to orchestrate domestic legitimacy for those policies. Presidential appointments, both major and minor, provide executive entree into these bureaucratic agencies.

The existence of formal structures does not guarantee a President smooth decision making or policy implementation processes. As noted earlier, governmental institutions, like all organizations, operate with complex sub-routines which, contrary to expectations of process expediency, often make any amount of production a marvel. Bureaucratic agencies are in fact institutions which demand much from the President. The President's task is to obtain policy results through the bureaucratic conviction that the implementation of a Presidential initiative sustains their existence.

The relationship between President and bureaucrat is an uneasy one. Conflicting loyalties to department and the

which these perceptions drove working relationships. For those especially relevant to the present work, see Lyndon B. Johnson, The Vantage Point: Perspectives of the Presidency, 1963-1969 (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1971); Richard M. Nixon, RN: Memoirs (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1978); Gerald R. Ford, A Time to Heal (New York: Harper and Row, 1979); and Henry A. Kissinger, White House Years (Boston: Little Brown and Company, 1978), and Years of Upheaval (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1982).

Chief Executive represent a dilemma for the appointed bureaucrat, and this tension results in what is often seen as 'bureaucratic inertia' or 'organizational routine.' The bureaucrat's resolution of demands and pressures confronts the President as apparent bureaucratic biases and inaction. Structures of government which exist to support and implement Presidential policies often appear (and frequently are) detrimental to an expedient process. But the President cannot simply rely on the formal powers granted him under the Constitution as Chief Executive or Commander in Chief of the military to achieve policy results. A President must often rely on personal resources to achieve his policy goals.

Presidential Resources

Presidential resources refer to the intangibles of office and leadership. Some of these resources derive from the prestige of the Presidency itself and the professional reputation of the incumbent as a skillful player of the game, and some derive from the political strength and popularity of the incumbent.³⁸ While distinct, it is important to realize that the one cannot be fully separated from the other, as it is the prestige of the office which allows a skillful

³⁸ For a discussion of the fundamental importance of Presidential prestige as a political resource, see Neustadt, Presidential Power, ch. 4. See also Samuel Kernell, Going Public: New Strategies of Presidential Leadership (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quarterly Press, 1986), pp. 145-150.

President to maximize his political strengths, and the strength of the President which importantly affects the prestige of the office.

As Neustadt has pointed out, the most meaningful Presidential power is the power to persuade.³⁹ The President's persuasive ability, aside from personal skill, derives some strength from the fact that he holds the highest political office in the land and can thus claim a certain political legitimacy for policy actions. Because the President is alone in claiming a national constituency, the 'health of the whole' gives him a powerful basis to generate support for his policies.

Presidents attempt to translate their unique vantage point, their powers and influence resources, and their total experience in government into political leverage. This experience, coupled with any significant non-governmental or campaign associations the President may have, augments the formal bureaucracy supporting the Executive, and provides the President with many and varied contacts and potential influence points on which to exercise political leverage. These can be important contacts and leverages, particularly in the closing stages of a war when the President perceives

³⁹ Neustadt, Presidential Power, p. 32. Neustadt draws again on Truman for this insight: "'I sit here all day trying to persuade people to do the things they ought to have sense enough to do without my persuading them...[t]hat's all the powers of the President amount to.'"

intense pressures to act in ways contrary to his own preferences. The competing interests and pressures of the various governmental agencies allows the President to maneuver among them to prevent any one pressure from gaining too much power. By preventing an empowered opposition from forming, the President succeeds in sustaining legitimacy for his own war termination policies.

The general public is also a Presidential resource, representing at once a subject for and basis of Presidential influence. The President's claim to a national constituency represents a way for the Executive to circumvent bureaucratic inertia or political opposition to his policies. A President's special claim to the general public--his ability to 'go public'---stems from the fact that he alone of all elected politicians can claim legitimacy on the basis of the greater national interest rather than narrow particular interests to which members of Congress must attend.⁴⁰

Presidential Incentives

What motivates the President to chose a particular war termination policy? Three motivating influences appear to be

⁴⁰ For an indepth discussion of 'going public,' particularly as a latter day phenomenon of the Presidency, see Kernell, Going Public. For a discussion of how Nixon used this technique to achieve policy legitimacy see, Aaron Wildavsky's discussion of Nixon's 'Plebiscitary view of Presidency,' in "Government and the People," pp. 45-59, in Aaron Wildavsky, ed. Perspectives on the Presidency (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1975), p. 55.

the most significant: re-election, popular acclaim, and history's favor.⁴¹

The political realities of public office-holding bear down hard on every elected official, and the President is no exception. The desire for re-election represents a compelling motivation for first-term Presidents faced with pressures to demonstrate policy success. Nevertheless, it is difficult to determine precisely the extent of the electoral motivation behind Presidential decisions and actions. Indeed, President's themselves, often do not know the exact reasons for their behavior. But we do know that Presidents, from the moment of their election, are under severe time constraints. They must initiate policies and, with luck, begin the process of implementation to capitalize on successes or overcome adversities in time for re-election---today 'in time for re-election' means no more than two and one half to three years into a term. Getting elected and staying in office is a prime motivator of politicians and political behavior. As Theodore Sorensen observed, politics is "...an ever-present influence---counterbalancing the unrealistic, checking the unreasonable, sometimes preventing the desirable, but always

⁴¹ For discussions of other Presidential incentives see, Cronin, State of the Presidency, p. 182. Cronin cites underlying incentives shaping Presidential performance as the doing those things which are a) easy; b) urgent; c) 'Presidential.' Neustadt observes that a President's actions are motivated by a need to a) ease his own conscience; b) conciliate a faction; c) please a trusted counsellor; and d) countervail opposing power (Presidential Power, p.87).

testing what is acceptable."⁴² There is possibly no better description of the re-election incentive as it applies to Presidents in office.

Obviously, however, the prospect of another term in office is not the only incentive which motivates a President. A second term President, obviously less inspired by re-election, is motivated instead by desires for popular acclaim or 'history's favor.'

For people in general, and perhaps politicians in particular, there is a genuine need to be popular. For Presidents, popularity is important beyond reasons related to personal prestige; it forms the basis of their political strength as President. Without popular support, the President has lost a valuable resource, and any public appeal he may make to bypass a recalcitrant Congress or unresponsive bureaucracy will be less effective.⁴³ Clearly the President has real incentives to maintain an acceptable level of popularity with the general public for the political advantage this popularity conveys.

Dreams of historical greatness tie into the personal prestige derived from popularity to motivate Presidential action. Men who have served as President have often found themselves on the threshold or in the throes of an historic

⁴² Theodore C. Sorensen, Decision Making in the White House (New York: Columbia University Press, 1963), p. 44.

⁴³ See Kernell, Going Public, especially chapter 6.

moment, and have generally realized the moment for what it was and as it would eventually be seen. Truman considering Hiroshima, Kennedy staring down Khrushchev, Johnson authorizing Rolling Thunder, and Nixon in Peking, are examples. While obviously Presidents want to be remembered for their successes, they are equally motivated by the opposite possibility. That is, Presidents act as much to avoid historical registry for the 'wrong' decision, as they do to achieve fame.

In the final analysis, we might consider these incentives as Presidential pressure on himself. That is, motivated by re-election, for example, a President is moved to choose certain policy positions or means of implementation that will yield future electoral successes. In the termination of an asymmetrical limited war, the President will attempt to achieve as much of the original war aims as possible. If unsuccessful, he will devalue those objectives based on what he perceives can be achieved. Both of these techniques are designed to cast the President and his policies in the most favorable light.

Because the President is politically motivated, even in his foreign policy actions, it is not unlikely that his objectives may collide with those of other domestic groups. These collisions can be catastrophic for the nation's war termination policies.

The Dilemma of Terminating an Asymmetrical Limited War

Though the powers of the President are generally perceived as formidable, scholars have told us that while the Presidency is at once too powerful, it is always inadequate. The Presidency is

[a]lways too powerful because it is contrary to our ideal of a 'government by the people' and always too powerful, as well, because it now possesses the capacity to wage nuclear war (a capacity that unfortunately doesn't permit much in the way of checks and balances and deliberative, participatory government). Yet always inadequate because it seldom achieves our highest hopes for it, not to mention its own stated intentions.⁴⁴

This points to the policy dilemma facing the Presidency in war termination. Though immensely powerful by virtue of a unique position at the center of government, every President is confronted with the task of accomplishing nearly unattainable policy goals while accommodating, to greater or lesser degrees, the expectations of policy outcomes and pressure for their implementation, which the various domestic groups insist upon.

The President's tools for doing accommodating these pressures are essentially the bureaucracy surrounding the Executive Branch and the personal and political resources he can bring to bear to generate results from this bureaucracy--both of which must function within the wider framework of the entire government. The policy imperatives he advances, and the points at which he applies pressure to achieve them, depend, in turn, on his political motivations and incentives.

⁴⁴ Cronin, The State of the Presidency, p. 22.

Presidents take bold foreign policy moves in an election year, though only if they are calculated to succeed.

But in addition to competing domestic pressures, time constraints, limited knowledge, and scant control over policy implementation act to constrain Presidential action.⁴⁵

Time constraints are imposed not only by the four year duration of a Presidential term, but also by mid-term elections and the time-frame of war. Given the pressures of time, Presidents are loathed to rely exclusively on bureaucratic processes for the implementation of their policies. To achieve rapid successes, it is often desirable that the solution to a problem be found from those which do not heavily depend on agencies external to the White House for their implementation.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ For an extended discussion of these and other obstacles to quality decision-making, see the section on "Sources of Impediments to Information Processing" in George, Presidential Decisionmaking in Foreign Policy.

⁴⁶ An example of this is the increasing reliance on Executive Agreements, as the means of solidifying international understandings, as opposed to formal Treaties. Treaties require two-thirds approval of the Senate, and this process is often politically charged and potentially embarrassing to the President. The Executive Agreement can be seen as a means of centralizing the policy implementation process to spare the President and those with whom the agreement is made, unwanted disclosure of negotiating detail, inordinate delay, and the political expense of controversial agreement. For a discussion of the use of Executive Agreements in this way see Loch Johnson and James M. McCormick "Foreign Policy by Executive Fiat," Foreign Policy 28 (Fall 1977): 117-138.

Presidents cope with knowledge limitations by relying on their experience--their own to choose competent advisers, and that of the advisers they choose.⁴⁷ Though equipped with a Cabinet system that divides Presidential 'experts' by functional area, Presidents have not demonstrated any hesitancy to call on whomever they chose for policy advice. Though the President must obtain Senatorial confirmation for key appointments, he requires no one's approval to dismiss these appointees. Indeed, the 'key'-ness of a position is ultimately determined by the President himself. Nixon's limited use of Secretary of State Rogers and heavy reliance on National Security Adviser Kissinger illustrates the degree to which a President can circumvent other officials in his administration and establish, what is for him, a more agreeable and eminently more workable arrangement for policy making.⁴⁸

For policy implementation, the task is far more difficult, though the Presidential desire for as much control as possible here is no less than in the policy formulation

⁴⁷ See George's discussion of the limits of Presidential knowledge, their attempts to overcoming these limitations, and the pitfalls which confront these attempts in Presidential Decisionmaking, pp. 25-53. For other discussions of limitations of Presidential decisionmaking, see Cronin, State of the Presidency, pp. 332-336; and Theodore Sorensen, Decision Making in the White House, pp. 24-42.

⁴⁸ For a discussion of Nixon and his political appointees, see Richard Tanner Johnson, Managing the White House, pp. 199-229.

stage. As noted earlier, the bureaucracy exists to provide the administrative underpinnings of the governmental process. Often however, it is perceived as a nearly insurmountable hindrance to that process.⁴⁹ Bureaucratic pathologies often manifest themselves as political setbacks, and Presidents have sought ways to bypass the bureaucracy. One way is to choose courses of action which reduce Presidential reliance on the departments for critical aspects of policy implementation. Thus Nixon used Kissinger to take the initial, difficult steps paving the Presidential way to China and the Soviet Union, and left the 'administrivia' of flight schedules and meal plans to the State Department.

Another means of overcoming bureaucratic opposition and inertia is through politicization of the bureaucracy. Politicization is achieved through Presidential appointments and increasing involvement on the part of White House agencies in the political aspects of the policy-making process such as translating political ideology into policy and lobbying on behalf of that policy.⁵⁰ One proceeds from the other. As more political appointees infiltrate the bureaucracy, more and more policy formulation and implementation take on partisan colors.

⁴⁹ For a discussion of the policy decision-implementation dilemma for Presidents, see Cronin, State of the Presidency, p. 268.

⁵⁰ Moe, "The Politicized Presidency," p. 235.

The question of 'neutral competence' surfaces with a vengeance here. Neutral competence is a concept of civil service in government which "...envisions a continuous, uncommitted facility at the disposal of, and for the support of, political leadership."⁵¹ Though perhaps theoretically desirable, neutral competence is often considered to be politically undesirable. A President wants institutions which are responsive to his needs as a politician---he wants 'responsive competence,' not 'neutral competence;' hence his efforts to populate the ranks of the bureaucracy with political appointees.⁵²

Increased bureaucratization, centralization of the decision-making process in the White House, and greater politicization of the processes of government are means by which Presidents attempt to sustain policy legitimacy and avoid the formation of empowered opposition which threatens his war termination policies. These methods---bureaucratization, centralization and politicization---are emerging trends in the development of the Executive Branch in

⁵¹ Heclo, "OMB and the Presidency---The Problem of Neutral Competence," p. 81. Heclo maintains that neutral competence is desirable in government. He decries what he sees as an erosion of the standards of neutral competence stemming from "...a real... danger...that demands on government performance are growing and...the need for continuity, executive branch coordination, and independent analysis is increasing..."

⁵² Moe, "The Politicized Presidency," pp. 239, 244-245.

the era of the modern Presidency.⁵³ They are not merely one-shot attempts by which Presidents have sought to achieve their aims. Rather, they are manifested institutional responses to pressures from the domestic political environment.

Summary

This chapter has offered an institutional conceptualization of domestic politics which focused on how various domestic groups within this country might pressure war termination policy making. In the United States, the President as the locus of decision-making, confronts many preferences, demands, and expectations from various groups trying to influence war termination decision-making. In the face of these pressures, the President attempts to sustain legitimacy for his chosen policies by using the organizational structure of the Executive Branch of government and the other resources of his office. The President is motivated to formulate and adjust policy by his desires for re-election, popular support or history's favor.

The legitimation process represents the President's effort to achieve politically acceptable and substantively prudent courses of action in the process of achieving the ultimate

⁵³ Noting this with particular reference to the Nixon administration is Wildavsky in "Government and the People," in Wildavsky, ed. Perspectives on the Presidency, pp. 56-57. See also the discussion of 'peopling the government' in Crabb and Mulcahy, Presidents and Foreign Policy Making, pp. 24-25.

goal of ending a war. The Chief Executive attempts to shunt off those pressures he does not feel compelled, or motivated, to respond to, with the structures and resources of his office. He addresses those pressures which he is unable to shunt off, or those to which he desires to be responsive, or which are perhaps even welcome.

Domestic groups such as Congress, Presidential advisers, the press, the general public and the military, have complex interests in war termination and act to influence Presidential policy making. Knowing how and which interests emerge from the principal domestic actors is important, but it is also necessary to develop some understanding of how those interests are translated into pressures on Presidential decision making.

Some groups have the ability to exert pressure directly on Presidential decisions. The power of the purse gives Congress the opportunity for direct and relatively unambiguous influence. For example, by cutting off funding for military activity in and around Vietnam in early 1975, Congress constrained the actions of President Ford who was trying to respond to the request of the South Vietnamese for aid in the face of a renewed offensive mounted by the North Vietnamese. Other groups can effectively influence the President only indirectly. Interest groups, though not addressed in this study, are an example; they are better equipped to focus their attention on individual Congressmen who have more

narrow interests than the President as a function of their smaller and more particularized constituencies.

In war termination major Presidential decisions, such as whether to pursue military victory or seek peace, set broad guidelines for the many lesser supplemental decisions which are involved with policy implementation. Examples of these lesser decisions include decisions to formulate and alter one's terms for settlement, begin, halt or continue bombing; increase or decrease troop levels at what speed and in what number; and begin, halt or intensify negotiations. But it is the major decisions which reflect the response of the President to what he perceives to be pressure from the salient domestic publics.

One might think of such things as the rank ordering of issues or objectives around which the war is fought and negotiations are conducted, as major decisions. For example, the maintenance of the Thieu regime was always a goal of our effort in Vietnam (as well as in Paris), but it did not always maintain a consistent location on our list of priorities. Negotiations and the progress of the war, as filtered through domestic politics, caused the decision-makers to reassess at various times the value of this objective. But issues of this type are not on the same scale as the decision, arrived at in the Spring of 1968, to undertake a major de-escalation of our effort in Vietnam, and shift focus to ending the war rather than fighting it.

A President is fundamentally politically motivated; he must be sensitive to the political environment and end a controversial war in a way that will safeguard the national interest and ensure his own political longevity. The problem of accommodating the President's desire for re-election with the substantive needs of foreign policy exposes two tensions which exist in a democratic society. The first is the tension which exists between the search for 'better decisions' in ways which preserve the democratic process while guaranteeing efficient government. The second pits the requirement for rapid executive action against the rights of the people to know what their government is up to. The termination of an asymmetrical limited war often brightly illuminates these tensions.

The following section consists of three chapters, each corresponding to a major war termination decision: Johnson's decision in 1968 to de-escalate; Nixon's choice of a complex strategy involving withdrawals, negotiations and Vietnamization in 1969; and the decision in January 1973 to accept the terms of a formal peace treaty. If these chapters demonstrate that it is the complex domestic political inducements and pressures which yielded these major policy choices of the war, in the face of systemic counter-demands for policy, an important limitation of structuralism will be established.

Chapter 3

The Decision to De-Escalate the War

We are prepared to move immediately toward peace through negotiations...in the hope that this action will lead to early talks, I am taking the first step to de-escalate the conflict. We are reducing--substantially reducing--the present level of hostilities. And we are doing so unilaterally and at once.¹

It is easy to forget that on the evening of March 31, 1968, Lyndon Johnson did far more than merely tell America he would not seek re-election. His stunning announcement about his fate as President obscures, for many, the fact that at the opening of his speech, he announced a halt to the bombing of North Vietnam and an end to the rising commitment the United States had been making on behalf of its South Vietnamese ally. These announcements marked the beginning of the end of the Vietnam war just as surely as Johnson's renouncing a second term marked the beginning of the end of his public life. The speech marked a turning point---for himself, for the nation, and for the war.

Although the President's opening remarks suggested a unified position within his administration seeking "...peace in Vietnam and Southeast Asia," the actual state of affairs

¹ Public Papers of Lyndon B. Johnson, 1968-69, (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1970), 2 volumes. Volume I: 469-476. [Hereafter referred to as Public Papers: LBJ.]

betrayed profound discord within his government. Johnson himself had decided the direction and tone of the address only two days before its delivery, and continued to revise the text almost until the moment he looked into the television camera. His even tone that Sunday night never revealed the agonizing process of policy reassessment that had plagued his administration. The decisions of March 31 lay rooted in events of the previous six months and reflected those of a President awash in conflicting tides of policy-making in war.

The early months of 1968 saw many national crises and personal challenges to the President. The USS Pueblo had been seized January 22 by North Korean forces, requiring the mobilization of over 150 aircraft to U.S. bases in South Korea and the activation of nearly 15,000 reservists to replace the units sent; a budgetary crisis of some proportion loomed precipitously and menaced the entire political agenda; political violence threatened in Western Europe; early activity on the campaign trail exposed political opposition within the ranks of the President's own party which was dramatized by Eugene McCarthy's strong showing in the New Hampshire primary and Robert Kennedy's announcement that he would challenge for the Democratic Presidential nomination; and in Vietnam, the Communist Tet offensive seemed to put the lie to the official line that U.S. and South Vietnamese forces had gained the upper hand in the war.

A major reassessment of policy could have hardly come at a

less welcome moment, but this was not of Johnson's choosing. In the throes of the Tet Offensive, the U.S. military, supported by right-wing members of Congress, sought to force the President to make the commitment to the war they felt had long been needed. Their request for an additional 206,000 more troops to support military operations in Vietnam---representing a 40% increase over current numbers---cast the basis for the entire U.S. combat effort in a new light. Congressional opposition to the administration's war policies mounted, mirroring public sentiment; and one by ever more significant one, Johnson's top advisers reversed their earlier support for the war and urged him to halt the bombing of the North and begin to reduce the number of U.S. troops in the South.

The present chapter considers Johnson's decision to de-escalate the war in Vietnam---a change in policy that reversed a trend begun four years earlier. These events symbolize a profound shift from 'war fighting' to 'war ending.' The decisions of 1968 reveal a President increasingly weary of the political struggle at home and ever more frustrated by apparently successful battlefield results whose cumulative political effect brought the U.S. no closer to victory. The following pages discuss how these same realities combined to undermine the strength of the political will of the nation to continue the war. This loss of resolve to continue the struggle meant that the costs associated with

the war, particularly in terms of human life, would no longer be supported. Thus Johnson, unable to sustain sufficient domestic legitimacy for his policies, took steps to institute change.

The announcements of March 31 revealed a President who genuinely desired to end the war, and de-escalation represented the first step toward that goal by casting off policies the administration had established and followed since 1964. Johnson's migration to policy change began taking shape in the Fall of the previous year; the story of March 1968 begins in September 1967.

The Gathering Storm

The autumn of 1967 brought uneasy relief to the heat of a politically explosive summer. July and August had seen anti-war protests and race riots dominate American politics, and these events pointed to an ever-widening gulf in U.S. politics between the government and the people. Combined with the domestic unrest, the war accentuated the distance between the margins of American politics.

Within government, the 'hawks,' right-wing Republicans and conservative Democrats imbued with an enduring cold war mentality, saw the Vietnam conflict through an 'east-west' prism. The war was a part of the global struggle with Communism. If we did not rally to our ally's side in Vietnam, they reasoned, the countries of Southeast Asia would

fall like dominoes and the Communists would be encouraged to pursue their designs of global hegemony elsewhere. The failure of the U.S. in Vietnam would mean that they could do so with impunity. The 'doves' were a far less homogeneous group than their conservative counterparts. An amalgam of committed pacifists, student radicals and anti-war liberals, the doves challenged the administration with equal vigor from the opposite pole, convinced that the entire enterprise in Vietnam was folly. Middle America, predictably, occupied the ground between these extremes, but as the war continued, and the increasing economic and manpower requirements of the war began to be felt, more and more people grew weary---frustrated with an apparent lack of progress.²

In August 1967, Johnson had made a successful appeal to Congress for a ten percent tax surcharge which would "...continue for so long as the unusual expenditures associated with our effort in Vietnam require higher revenues."³ Until this point the costs of the war had been

² John E. Mueller, "Trends in Popular Support for the Wars in Korea and Vietnam," American Political Science Review 65 (June 1971): 358-75; Peter W. Sperlich and William L. Lunch, "American Public Opinion and the War in Vietnam," Western Political Quarterly 32 (March 1979): 21-44, and Sidney Verba, et. al., "Public Opinion and the War in Vietnam," American Political Science Review 61 (June 1967): 317-33

³ Public Papers: LBJ, 1967, volume II, p. 737. The details of this request appear in Johnson's "Special Message to Congress: The State of the Budget and the Economy," August 3, 1967. Public Papers: LBJ, 1967, book II, pp. 733-740.

absorbed by the economy, a practice whose delayed effects were making themselves increasingly felt. A Gallup poll taken shortly after the tax increase indicated that for the first time, a majority of Americans thought the war in Vietnam was a mistake.⁴

The administration, though cautious, remained optimistic. Reports from earlier in the year, which gave qualified endorsement to the notion that the U.S. had turned the tide and indeed could eventually 'win' this war, had begun a flow of official memoranda, message traffic and studies, the cumulative effect of which advanced the idea that successful progress was being made in the war, and military victory could indeed be achieved.⁵ The only question that remained to be answered was, when?

In the early years, the answer to that question was thought to reside largely in the results of the military's combat efforts. Though the Johnson administration sought to end the fighting via diplomacy numerous times, the regime of Ho Chi Minh proved remarkably adept at playing the political game of

⁴ A compilation of the trend in public support for the war during the period 1969 through 1969, containing, of course, the period relevant to the present chapter, is contained in The Gallup Opinion Index 52 (October 1969): 1-15.

⁵ See, for example, Meeting Notes File, Box 2, September 1, 1967-April 29, 1968; and National Security Files, Confidential File, Country File Vietnam ND 19/CO 312, October-December 1967, Lyndon B. Johnson Library, Austin Texas. See also, The Pentagon Papers, Senator Gravel edition, 4 volumes (Boston: Beacon Press, 1971), IV, pp. 389-92.

international negotiations. Public and private communications from Hanoi were rarely consistent, and the Communists scornfully rejected nearly every U.S. suggestion that the adversaries talk peace. By 1966, it became clear that the North Vietnamese would not negotiate, or even accept conditions for beginning talks if reciprocal concessions were a prerequisite. Hardened by what he perceived to be an immutable and duplicitous adversary, Johnson became convinced that the way to the negotiating table was via the battlefield. Clearly Washington wanted peace in Vietnam, but Johnson believed a strong, anti-communist government in South Vietnam was necessary to ensure this and that could only be guaranteed by the presence of U.S. military power.⁶

From the moment LBJ authorized the first aerial bombardment strikes and the first major ground troop deployments to South

⁶ According to Allan Goodman: "Once at war, Washington's strategy for terminating it depended on success on the battlefield. In President Johnson's mind, achieving a position of strength became an essential prerequisite for negotiations. The President quickly realized that such a position was not likely to be achieved rapidly merely by strengthening the GVN. It was essential at the same time to increase military pressure on North Vietnam and thus compel Hanoi to negotiate." The Lost Peace (Stanford, California: Hoover Institution, 1978), p. 24. Over the course of three years, the U.S ground force commitment grew from 23,000 in December 1964 to almost 450,000 in December 1967, and, as the level of American military activity grew, the possibility of a negotiated settlement shrank. The bitter and largely fruitless experience of attempting to negotiate with Hanoi coupled with the widened ground war and its reported progress generated and supported the feeling in Washington that the war could be 'won' through the military defeat of the North Vietnamese.

Vietnam in 1965, the uniformed services became the chief advocates of a military solution to the war. The military naturally pressed hard for the resources thought necessary to a successful and expedient prosecution of the conflict. Their combat experience in this century had validated a strategy and doctrine of war fighting which traced its roots to a deep-seated American preference to avoid unnecessary loss of human life in war. Complex military organization, massive firepower and modern technology were the hallmarks of the 'American way of war,' and the Vietnam experience would be no different.

As the war in Vietnam developed, two distinct elements of the American effort emerged: ground combat and aerial bombardment. While the ground war belonged to the Army, the air war, code-named "Rolling Thunder," was conceived and executed principally by the Air Force with support from the Navy. For reasons relating to his desire to maintain the costs of the war at minimum levels, Johnson relied heavily on the air war to achieve the objectives in Vietnam.⁷ The ground war, once underway however, offered unintended competition to the aerial effort for the limited resources which the President was willing to commit to the war. The

⁷ For a detailed and critical treatment of the Rolling Thunder operation, see the book by former Department of Defense analyst James C. Thompson, Rolling Thunder: Understanding Policy and Program Failure (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980.)

administration's close control over the allocation of men and materiel committed to the war effort would be something which the military would fight throughout the duration of active combat in Vietnam. One side-effect of the two distinct military combat efforts was that the institutional differences among the services, particularly the Army and Air Force, were cast in sharp relief. These long-standing, and often not so subtle, inter-service rivalries had been brewing since the formation of the Air Force in the wake of World War II.

The combination of events which led President Eisenhower to adopt a strategic doctrine of 'massive retaliation' formed the basis of, and justification for, the institutional rise of the Air Force to a prominent role in this nation's defense. Threatening nuclear retaliation to Communist aggression, the Eisenhower administration relied on the Air Force as the military agent who would make good that threat. Throughout the 1950s the Army struggled to maintain a significant role in national defense.⁸

⁸ In the wake of World War II, with the establishment of the Air Force and the institution of the strategic doctrine of 'massive retaliation,' the Army's frustration with its rapidly diminishing responsibilities and prestige bubbled to the surface in a series of articles published in the New York Times in May 1956. For an indictment of the policies which the Army labored under during the Eisenhower years, see Maxwell Taylor, The Uncertain Trumpet (New York: Harper, 1960). See also David Halberstam, The Best and The Brightest (New York: Random House, 1969), especially pp. 472-477.

With the election of John F. Kennedy in 1960 and the rejection of 'massive retaliation' in favor of 'flexible response,' the Army anticipated a change in national policy to their advantage. They did not, however, correctly anticipate the nature of that change. Kennedy's concerns over what he perceived to be Soviet intentions to instigate and abet wars of "national liberation" throughout the Third World, led him to envisage a fighting force capable of waging war at the lower end of the intensity spectrum.⁹ Kennedy's notion of a military organization equipped to wage counter-insurgency warfare led to the development of Special Forces within the Army. He confronted stiff opposition, however, from the Army's leaders who desired a return to national command emphasis on the Army's capability to fight mid-intensity conventional war.¹⁰

⁹ See, for example, his address at West Point in June 1962. Public Papers: JFK, 1962, pp. 452-55.

¹⁰ Krepinevich, The Army in Vietnam (Baltimore: Johns-Hopkins University Press, 1986), pp. 29-33. This volume details the military's resistance to insurgency doctrine, and suggests that the Army's institutional commitment to mid-intensity doctrine---large forces combined with superior weaponry and massed firepower---was the principal cause of failure in Vietnam. Krepinevich's work countervails the institutional self-criticism of the Army represented best in the work of Harry Summers, On Strategy: The Vietnam War in Context (Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania: Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, 1982). Krepinevich rejects Summers' claims that lack of strategic resolve, the failure on the part of the civilian leadership to secure popular backing for the war, and a strangulating control on the war by non-military leaders contributed to the defeat. Interested readers should also see General Bruce Palmer's very competent treatment of the military in Vietnam, The

The young president persistently directed the Army to expand its doctrinal notions and institute a Special Forces program commensurate with the administration's emphasis on counter-insurgency. The Army's means to resist this unwanted mission, however, proved formidable. Rejecting the notion that counter-insurgency warfare required any particular skill, the Army remained convinced that because of its doctrinal emphasis on large forces supported by superior technology and massive firepower, conflicts which required less could be easily handled by simply 'scaling down.'¹¹ In simple terms, the massive organization and established operations of the Army militated against counter-insurgency doctrine.

As a result, the Army marginalized the study and development of unconventional warfare and indeed, were "still reviewing the concept" when Lyndon Johnson was elected President in 1964.¹² Though Special Forces operations went on in Vietnam, the bulk of the ground effort was committed to fighting conventional warfare as the Army had developed the concept. The military's view was that this nation wins its

Twenty-five Year War: America's Military Role in Vietnam (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1984); and David R. Palmer, Summons of the Trumpet (San Rafael, California: Presidio Press, 1978.)

¹¹ Krepinevich, Army in Vietnam, pp. 36-38.

¹² Ibid., p. 40.

wars through an effective strategy of attrition. Through the steady application of heavily equipped units supported by massive firepower, the U.S. would inflict unacceptable losses on the enemy while preventing the same in return.

In Vietnam a major problem with this strategy was the fact, eventually recognized by McNamara and a number of secondary advisers, that the enemy controlled the rate at which his forces were attritted by manipulating the timing, location, and tempo of the major battles.¹³ This argument did not surface in the early years of the war, but when it was made public in August of 1967 in Senate Preparedness Subcommittee hearings, it gave the opponents of the war a strong basis from which to challenge the military's efforts to obtain additional resources for combat. Because the war represented the commitment of that most precious of national resources---the country's youth---the ground effort continually struggled with both domestic opposition and with the air campaign, for its essential means to wage war.

An important but subordinate part of the ground war was the less glamorous and nearly impossible task of pacification; a program designed to relieve the South Vietnamese citizens residing in the provinces from the fears of Viet Cong

¹³ See the below discussion of the Hearings Before the Senate Preparedness Investigating Subcommittee of the Committee on Armed Services, Air War Against North Vietnam, 90th Congress, 1st session, August 25, 1967. See also Krepinevich, Army in Vietnam, pp. 188, 190.

reprisals for supporting the Saigon regime. The operational concept called for an entrenched defense of provincial villages and towns, supported by mobile counter-insurgency units which would ferret out and eliminate Communist elements. Pacification of the countryside was a key to achieving U.S. objectives in Vietnam. Most officials widely recognized that success in the war hinged on achieving two goals: containing the Communist advance and establishing a politically stable government in Saigon. From the earliest days of U.S. involvement in South Vietnam, pacification was seen as vital to achieving the latter goal.

In May 1967 the Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support (CORDS) program had been implemented under the direction of former Special Assistant to President Johnson, Robert W. Komer. This latest effort at pacification was the step-child of earlier efforts such as the ill-fated Strategic Hamlet and Phoenix programs.¹⁴ Over the course of the war, claims that various percentages of South Vietnam were under the 'control' of Saigon, or 'pacified,' belied a truly precarious reality. 'Pacification' often vanished with the daylight or with the departure of allied troops. The program never achieved the degree of success necessary to

¹⁴ See the Pentagon Papers, II, pp. 515-623, and Thomas W. Scoville, "United States Organization for Pacification Advice and Support in Vietnam, 1954-1968" (unpublished doctoral dissertation, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1976).

underpin the Government of South Vietnam.¹⁵ Thus conventional combat bore the heaviest burden of the ground war.

By Autumn 1967, with both the ground and air wars in full swing, domestic criticism of the war---particularly the air campaign---began to mount. Public criticism was fueled to a large degree by media accounts of the bombardments' massive destruction, and official misgivings stemmed from concerns that the effects of the bombing had reached the 'flat of the curve,' and its continuation brought undesirable political effects upon the administration.¹⁶ While opponents to the war

¹⁵ In November 1967, the Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (MACV) defined Pacification as the "military, political, economic and social process of establishing or re-establishing local government responsive to and involving the participation of the people. It includes the provision of sustained, credible territorial security, the destruction of the enemy's underground government, the assertion or re-assertion of political control and involvement of the people in government, and the initiation of economic and social activity capable of self-sustenance and expansion. The economic element of pacification includes the opening of roads and waterways and the maintenance of lines of communication important to economic and military activity." For a discussion of 'the other war' of pacification, see Robert W. Komer, "Bureaucracy does its Thing: Institutional Constraints on U.S.- GVN Performance in Vietnam," Rand Research Report R-967 (August 1972), pp. 110-118; and Krepinevich, Army in Vietnam, pp. 215-233.

¹⁶ According to one former Department of Defense official, there was a growing sense that the bombing raids were not justified by either their mounting operational costs or the yield of their operations. That is, the material costs of the program continued to rise but the ratio of yield to expenditures had leveled off. When coupled with the growing criticism of the program, officials within DoD, notably McNamara, began to take a considerably more critical look at the entire operation. Interview with Alain Enthoven, May 4, 1988. See also Gelb and Betts, The Irony of Vietnam: The

felt that there was too much bombing, the military, and its supporters, felt there was too little.

Designed to impede and reduce the flow of enemy troops and supplies across the intra-Vietnamese border and to impose an ever higher price on the North for its aggression in the South, the bombing campaign was intentionally limited. The military's opposition to the limitations stemmed from the feeling that the target restrictions imposed by the White House violated basic tenets of sound air war doctrine.

For "Rolling Thunder" to be successful, the military believed they needed to hit the enemy at three strategic points: at the source of war related materiel; along the routes by which supplies moved to the front; and on the battlefield itself, to increase the enemy's consumption of scarce and vital supplies such as ammunition and fuel. The military maintained that the United States' aerial effort, and consequently the ground war, could be made immeasurably more effective if the source of war supply---the ports---were hit. The freedom to strike these targets was all the more important because the weather restrictions of the monsoon season allowed effective bombing only from the middle of May to the middle of September each year.¹⁷

System Worked (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 1979), p. 148.

¹⁷ Townsend Hoopes, Limits of Intervention (New York:

The growing domestic dissatisfaction with the bombing grew, in part, from accounts of New York Times correspondent Harrison Salisbury who had traveled to North Vietnam earlier in the year and filed a series of sensational reports detailing how U.S. bombing raids routinely struck civilian targets and claimed hundreds of non-combatant lives.¹⁸ These reports combined with the increasing, and often dramatically divergent, official and media accounts of activity in Vietnam to spawn what Walter Lippmann called the 'credibility gap' of

David McKay Company, 1969), pp. 76-81. Hoopes, a former Under Secretary of the Air Force during this period, has suggested that in addition to being restricted to the fair weather months, the aerial campaign was also hampered by bomber inaccuracies. Hoopes observed that Air Force preoccupations with the development and fielding of strategic nuclear forces after World War II resulted in the service's neglect of tactical air operations. He writes: "It was...a little publicized fact that bombing inaccuracies had improved hardly at all in the period between Korea and Vietnam. Shrouded in professional embarrassment, the explanation was traceable to the Eisenhower-Dulles era and the strategy of 'massive retaliation.'" Throughout that period most of the Air Force money, operational energies, and creative research was applied to the development of strategic nuclear forces...while tactical aviation was starved and neglected. Even the few tactical fighter-bombers developed in those years were build and programmed as nuclear weapons carriers, and since pinpoint accuracy is not a necessity with nuclear weapons, no one devoted much attention to advancing the art of precision delivery." Limits of Intervention, p. 78.

¹⁸ See Harrison E. Salisbury, Behind the Lines: Hanoi: December 23, 1966-January 7, 1967 (London: Secker and Warburg, 1967). For analysis of the Salisbury reports and their impact, see Pentagon Papers, IV, p. 135; "Civilians Weren't the Target, But...", and "Behind Enemy Lines," Newsweek, January 9, 1967, pp. 17-18, 61-62, respectively; and James Aronson, The Press and the Cold War (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1970), pp. 181-245.

the Johnson administration.¹⁹

Johnson himself was acutely aware of the controversy surrounding his bombing policies. Since halting bombing raids during Christmas 1966, a series of bombing pauses were ordered, in order both to encourage the North to negotiate and to alleviate domestic concerns.²⁰ These pauses were often

¹⁹ See Lippmann's two-part article in the Washington Post, March 28, 1967, p. A17, and March 30, 1967, p. A21. Also, Pentagon Papers, IV, p. 455; and Herbert Y. Schandler, Unmaking of a President: Lyndon Johnson and the Vietnam War (Princeton: University Press, 1977), p. 49.

²⁰ A total of 14 complete or partial pauses were ordered over the period December 1966 through March 1968:

<u>Pause Initiated</u>	<u>Type/Duration</u>
23 Dec 66	Partial (within 10 nautical miles [NM] of center of Hanoi)/78 days
24 Dec 66	Complete/48-hours
31 Dec 66	Complete/48-hours
8 Feb 67	Complete/6 days ('Tet' truce)
22 May 67	Partial (as above)/18 days
23 May 67	Complete/24-hours
11 Jun 67	Partial (as above)/ 59 days
24 Aug 67	Partial (as above)/60 days
24 Dec 67	Complete/48-hours
31 Dec 67	Complete/48-hours
3 Jan 68	Partial (within 5 NM of center of Hanoi)/88 days
16 Jan 68	Partial (within 5 NM of center of Haiphong Harbor)/75 days
29 Jan 68	Complete/48-hours (broken by initiation of Communist Tet Offensive)
31 Mar 68	Partial (north of 20th parallel)/214 days

Johnson suspended bombing completely and finally on November 1, 1967. Table data drawn from Memo, Walt Rostow to the President, March 6, 1968, filed in "Vietnam 6A Bombing Pauses in Vietnam 1/66-3/68" in National Security File, Country File Vietnam, Box 93, LBJ Library; and Pentagon Papers, IV, pp. 8-17.

the source of great frustration to the administration, however. Despite private indications from Hanoi that such a move would generate a willingness to negotiate seriously, North Vietnam invariably adopted a public stance that they would consider negotiations only following an unconditional bombing halt. Moreover, Hanoi often used these pauses to reinforce troops in forward deployment. Failing to accomplish anything with the pauses, the Administration would resume the bombardment, and would try to expose Hanoi's duplicity. The administration always renewed the bombing attacks with the claim that it would not take unilateral and unreciprocated acts to bring the war to an end. Such strong language inevitably resulted in renewed domestic criticism for the Johnson White House.²¹

Senior officials in the administration constantly debated the best course of action to follow in the air war. In a memorandum to President Johnson dated May 19, 1967, entitled "Future Actions in Vietnam," McNamara had opposed a request by the JCS to expand the bombing campaign. In a carefully

²¹ For administration accounts of the relationship between bombing pauses and negotiations, see Johnson, The Vantage Point: Perspectives on the Presidency: 1963-1969 (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1971), pp. 250, 252, 253-5, 257, 266-9, 493-6, 501-5, 508-510, 514-16; and George Christian, The President Steps Down (New York: Macmillan, 1970), pp. 34, and 73-4. For more critical assessments of the Johnson administration's handling of this relationship, see Daniel Ellsberg's Papers on the War (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1972), passim; and Theodore Draper, Abuse of Power (New York: Viking Press, 1967), pp. 183-7.

argued presentation, he observed three reasons for the bombing: to retaliate against the north and to lift the morale of forces in the South; to increase pressure on the North to end the war; and to "reduce the flow and/or increase the cost of infiltrating men and materiel from North to South."²²

Regarding each of these objectives, he noted "[w]e should not bomb for punitive reasons if it serves no other purpose...[i]t costs American lives; it creates a backfire of revulsion and opposition by killing civilians; it creates serious risks; it may harden the enemy." Insofar as the second objective is concerned, he wrote that the North "...can and will hold out at least so long as a prospect of winning the 'war of attrition' in the South exists." The interdiction mission had similarly failed to demonstrate success: "...it now appears that no combination of actions against the North short of destruction of the regime or occupation of North Vietnamese territory will physically reduce the flow of men and materiel below the relatively small amount needed by enemy forces to continue the war in the South."²³

McNamara's assessments were backed-up by CIA analysts who reported:

²² Pentagon Papers, IV, p. 171.

²³ Ibid.

Twenty-seven months of U.S. bombing of North Vietnam have had remarkably little effect on Hanoi's overall strategy in prosecuting the war, on its confident view of long-term Communist prospects, and on its political tactics regarding negotiations. The growing pressure of U.S. air operations has not shaken the North Vietnamese leaders' conviction that they can withstand the bombing and outlast the U.S. and South Vietnam in a protracted war of attrition. Nor has it caused them to waver in their belief that the outcome of this test of will and endurance will be determined primarily by the course of the conflict on the ground in the South, not by the air war in the North.²⁴

The dissenting views of McNamara, shared by a number of other secondary officials, formed the basis of internal administration opposition to the military's ever present and ever more insistent calls for an expanded and unconstrained bombing campaign. But aside from the internal cleavages developing within the administration, the bombing had become exceedingly problematic, both in Vietnam and in the United States. Militarily, it had failed to convey any decisive advantage, and yet continued to exact an ever higher price in terms of lost pilots and aircraft the longer it went on. Domestically, the bombing raids were the primary source of the growing dissatisfaction with the administration's handling of the war.

But while differences on policy were developing among officials in the upper levels of the Department of Defense,

²⁴ The CIA memorandum was written in May 1967 as part of the administration's comprehensive review of the bombing program. Pentagon Papers, IV, p. 168.

an interesting aspect of the military's constant call for combat resources became apparent. Despite the subtle rivalry between the Army and the Air Force for prominence in the war effort, the institutional differences among the services did not prevent military commanders, in near unanimity, consistently and strongly pressing the advantages of an unfettered air war. Air Force leaders argued that unrestrained aerial bombardment would allow the fullest, and therefore successful, expression of air power. The underlying rationale for unleashing this massive destructive capability was that a successful air war would demonstrate that the Air Force could not only carry the brunt of this particular war, but also establish its long-term strategic importance in national defense.

Ground commanders promoted the air war because they genuinely believed that bombing pauses in the North resulted in increased American and South Vietnamese casualties in the South.²⁵ They were frustrated that this association might not be made by civilian policy makers or observers outside government, who might be inclined instead to attribute rising casualty rates to generally poor military performance, or worse, a lack of leadership on the ground.

²⁵ The comments by General Wallace M. Green, Commandant of the Marine Corps, in an address given during one of the Administration-mandated bombing pauses typifies this view: "We have stopped [the bombing, and] we suffer additional casualties as a result." Vital Speeches 33 (June 1, 1967): 509-512, p. 512.

But precisely because of the magnitude of its destructive capability, the air war was held in check by the White House who was fearful that it could lead to the Soviet Union or the People's Republic of China joining the war.²⁶ The possibility that the bombardment could have such unintended consequences meant that the military were never completely successful in wresting control of the bombing away from the White House. The military did, however, achieve at one point or another, the opportunity to attack nearly every major target they requested.²⁷ Nevertheless, the military grew more and more critical of what they believed to be undue and incorrect handling of the war by senior civilian officials, and they sought avenues to make this displeasure known.²⁸

Tensions between Secretary of Defense McNamara, who increasingly felt that the bombing was yielding only marginal results, and the military, who gave essentially unqualified support to the program, erupted in August at hearings before the powerful and largely conservative Senate Preparedness Committee chaired by Senator John Stennis. Joined by Senators Strom Thurmond and Harry Birch, Stennis came down

²⁶ Pentagon Papers, IV, pp. 172, 474-5. Johnson, The Vantage Point, p. 369.

²⁷ Interview with Alain Enthoven, May 4, 1988. Gelb and Betts, The Irony of Vietnam, p. 136.

²⁸ See "Next for LBJ-'Agonizing Reappraisal'," U.S. News and World Report, August 14, 1967, pp. 32-34, and Pentagon Papers, IV, p. 199.

squarely on the side of the military, and used these hearings to give public air to resentments which had been brewing for some time across the Potomac.

In a thinly veiled attempt to discredit the Defense Secretary, expose what they believed to be his isolated opinions, and thereby remove him as an obstacle to military requests for unrestrained bombing, the committee heard testimony from every senior military officer associated with the air war. McNamara, recently returned from Saigon, was the only civilian called.²⁹

In his statement before the committee on August 25 McNamara defended the Administration's policy, and observed that increased bombing and fewer target restrictions, as desired by the military, would not yield results appreciably different from the current effort.

A selective, carefully targeted bombing campaign, such as we are presently conducting...can and does render the infiltration of men and supplies more difficult and more costly. At the same time, it demonstrates to both South and North Vietnam our resolve to see that aggression does not succeed. A less discriminating bombing campaign against North Vietnam would, in my opinion, do no more. We have no reason to believe that it would break the will of the North Vietnamese people or sway the purpose of their leaders. If it does not lead to such a change of mind, bombing the North at any level of intensity would not meet our objective.³⁰

²⁹ Pentagon Papers, IV, p. 197. See also pp. 200-204.

³⁰ "Statement of Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara Before the Preparedness Investigating Subcommittee of the Senate Armed Services Committee, Friday, August 25, 1967."

McNamara further argued that, given the North's demonstrated ability to endure extraordinary privation while continuing to wage war, expectations that an expanded bombing campaign would lead to victory sooner than under the current policies, were unwarranted.

Inclined to sympathize with the military and their supporters who claimed that the tight control exercised by civilians over the operation accounted, in large measure, for the inability of the campaign to bring decisive results, the committee's summary report issued August 31 indicted the policies which the administration had been following:

That the air campaign has not achieved its objectives to a greater extent cannot be attributed to inability or impotence of airpower. It attests, rather, to the fragmentation of our air might by overly restrictive controls, limitations, and the doctrine of 'gradualism' ...The top military leaders of this country are confident that the Port of Haiphong can be closed, the land lines of communication to China interdicted, and Hanoi's receipt and distribution by sea and land routes of war-sustaining materiel greatly reduced by Air Force and Navy aviation if they are permitted to do so...in view of the unsatisfactory progress of the war, logic and prudence requires that the decision be with the unanimous weight of professional military judgement...the cold fact is that [the administration's current] policy has not done the job and it has been contrary to the best military judgement. What is needed now is the hard decision to do whatever is necessary, take the risks that need to be taken, and apply the force that is

Filed in "Office Files of George Christian [Press Secretary to President Johnson]: Classified-George Christian [142] in Office Files of George Christian, Box 12, LBJ Library.

required to see the job through.³¹

Johnson had hoped to blunt the effects of the committee's hearings and assuage the right wing by approving the military's most recent request for additional bombing targets the day the sessions opened.³² In the wake of the committee's final report, he downplayed the significance of the policy differences in a news conference held September 1 at the LBJ ranch.³³ In truth, Johnson took a dim view of the whole affair, but particularly McNamara's testimony, believing that it exposed division within his administration and underscored rumors that criticism of his policies was as intense from within the executive bureaucracy as without.

Though McNamara's appearance before the Stennis committee was the first public evidence of the distance between his position on the war and that of the military, this was not the first time, nor was he the first top level adviser, to voice a variety of objections (though often inconsistent with each other) to Johnson's handling of the war. Differences among the members of the President's inner circle trace their origin to the earliest years of his administration.

³¹ U.S. Congress, Senate, Committee on Armed Services. Air War Against North Vietnam, Parts 1-5. Hearings before the Preparedness Investigating Subcommittee, 90th Congress, 1st Session, August 1967.

³² Pentagon Papers, IV, p. 198.

³³ Public Papers: LBJ, 1967, book II, pp. 816-825.

When Johnson assumed the Presidency in 1963, many key advisers continued to hold the same positions they had had under Kennedy, and in the beginning, Johnson took pains to accommodate himself to the system under which they operated.³⁴ But for LBJ, these would always be Kennedy's men and eventually they almost all resigned or were replaced as he sought to establish his own advisory system to reflect his own political agenda and personal style of leadership.³⁵

Not all departures were of the President's choosing. McGeorge Bundy, Johnson's first National Security Adviser, had gone to the Ford Foundation and was replaced by Walt Rostow. Robert Komer, former special assistant to Johnson, had gone to Vietnam in May 1967, taking up the post of aide to General Westmoreland in charge of pacification. George Ball, Undersecretary of State and resident administration critic of the war, resigned in September 1966.³⁶ Chester

³⁴ Doris Kearns, Lyndon Johnson and the American Dream (New York: Harper and Row, 1976), p. 174-6.

³⁵ For various treatments of Johnson's leadership style, see James David Barber, The Presidential Character: Predicting Performance in the White House (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1977), pp. 32-43; Joseph G. Bock, White House Staff and the National Security Assistant (New York: Greenwood Press, 1987), pp. 61-82; Cecil V. Crabb, Jr. and Kevin V. Mulcahy, Presidents and Foreign Policy Making From FDR to Reagan (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1986), pp. 198-236; Richard Tanner Johnson, Managing the White House (New York: Harper and Row, 1974), pp. 159-198; and Kearns, Lyndon Johnson and the American Dream, passim.

³⁶ By way of preamble to the much celebrated Draft

Cooper, former assistant to McGeorge Bundy on the National Security Council Staff had gone on to work for Averell Harriman at the State Department, and Bill Moyers, a former close personal friend and adviser to Johnson, who had served for a time as the President's press secretary, left under acrimonious circumstances in 1966, and was replaced by George Christian.³⁷

Like Presidents before him, but perhaps even more so, Johnson was bound in important ways to the operation of his predecessor. Kennedy's untimely death, the desirability of maintaining the principal staff intact to preserve some continuity, and Johnson's own involvement as Vice-President in the Kennedy system, offered little opportunity, even if he had been so inclined, for Johnson to immediately construct a completely new foreign policy apparatus. Moreover, though Johnson was markedly different from Kennedy, he did resemble his predecessor in several respects. Both made use of informal coordination mechanisms between staffs and among principal advisers and had little use for frequent, formal

Presidential Memorandum of May 1967 that reviewed the bombing campaign and offered recommendations for Presidential action, Deputy Secretary of Defense John J. McNaughton observed: "I fear that 'natural selection' in this environment will lead the Administration itself to become more and more homogenized--Mac Bundy, George Ball, Bill Moyers are gone. Who next?" (Pentagon Papers, IV, p. 479.) For one discussion of George Ball's position within the administration see, Halberstam, Best and Brightest, pp. 596-605, 763-765.

³⁷ Christian, The President Steps Down, p. 12.

staff meetings. Both viewed the NSC staff as an extension of their personal staffs, and both saw their key advisers as generalists to be organized on an ad hoc basis to allow the fullest representation of policy options.³⁸ Johnson however, was far more overbearing than Kennedy and preferred to foster confrontation and tension among his advisers to achieve agreement rather than allow a policy to emerge through discourse.

Under Johnson, the generally collegial atmosphere and habit of open debate which had often combined to make the policy process under Kennedy relatively effective, did not obtain the same measure of success. The lack of institutionalized arrangements for information sharing worked as long as key individuals did not perceive the exchange in win-lose terms. But Johnson's confrontative style trickled down to the staffs and coordination problems began to emerge particularly regarding the timeliness and validity of the information exchanged. As Johnson began to experience considerable and sustained domestic criticisms for his handling of the war in Vietnam, relations within the ranks of his advisers grew tense.

Some observers have claimed that tensions were exacerbated by the presence of Walt W. Rostow who replaced McGeorge Bundy as Johnson's National Security Assistant in April 1966.

³⁸ See the discussion in Bock, The White House Staff and the National Security Assistant, pp. 61-75.

Rostow often acted as a conduit of information and instruction between Johnson and the staff and drew objections from administration insiders who saw Rostow selectively filtering the information LBJ received.³⁹ As one official later wrote, Rostow was strong advocate of the administration's war policies and labored to present opposing views; his ability to offer the President all sides of an issue was often criticized for erring on the side of selectivity and exclusion.⁴⁰

Rostow's own views of Vietnam were intellectually reassuring to the President, and this fact gave him particular advantage at a time when the President was increasingly needy of reassurance. With Bill Moyers' departure, in particular, from the White House in 1966, Rostow's control of the information chain served to fuel allegations that Johnson was losing touch with the operational and political implications of his policies.⁴¹ Because much of the realigning of the advisory circle resulted from issues connected with the Vietnam War, those who remained either held positions which were generally compatible with the President's, or had, like William Bundy,

³⁹ Hoopes, Limits of Intervention, pp. 59-62. Bock, The White House Staff and the National Security Assistant, especially pp. 67-75, and notes to Chapter 5, pp. 75-82.

⁴⁰ Hoopes, Limits of Intervention, p. 60.

⁴¹ Bock, The White House Staff and the National Security Assistant, pp. 67-71.

subordinated their substantive concerns to their over-riding sense of service to the executive.⁴² But the homogenizing of views within the administration did not trouble Johnson as much as the growing discord outside its ranks.

Recognizing that external criticism was mounting, Johnson went on the offensive in an effort to mobilize support for his policies. In a major address on Vietnam on September 29 in San Antonio, Texas, the President stressed that his administration was making every effort to secure peace:

I know there are other questions on your minds, on the minds of many sincere, troubled Americans: 'Why not negotiate now?' so many ask me. The answer is that we and our South Vietnamese allies are wholly prepared to negotiate tonight. I am ready to talk with Ho Chi Minh, and other chiefs of state concerned, tomorrow. I am ready to send a trusted representative of America to any spot on this earth to talk in public or private with a spokesman of Hanoi. We have twice sought to have the issue of Vietnam dealt with by the United Nations---and twice Hanoi has refused. Our desire to negotiate peace---through the United Nations or out---has been made very, very clear to Hanoi---directly and many times through third parties.⁴³

He then proposed what would later become known as the 'San Antonio Formula: "The United States is willing to stop all aerial and naval bombardment of North Viet-Nam when this will lead promptly to productive discussions. We, of course, assume that while discussions proceed, North Viet-Nam would

⁴² David Halberstam argues that this began to occur among administration officials as early as 1964. Best and Brightest, p. 440.

⁴³ Public Papers: LBJ, 1967, book II, p. 879.

not take advantage of the bombing cessation or limitation.⁴⁴

Johnson recalled in his memoirs that this position was more moderate than earlier U.S. pronouncements; the language was deliberately more accommodating, and Johnson observed that he was not asking the North to pledge anything or make any demonstration of not taking advantage of the halt to resupply or reinforce their units in the South. This formulation had, to his mind, "...made it clear that we were prepared to 'assume' they would not take advantage of the cessation. All we asked was that a cessation of bombing would lead promptly to peace talks and that those talks would be 'productive.'"⁴⁵

The bombing pause proposal had, in various forms, surfaced before. The failure of the North Vietnamese to respond in any meaningful way formed the basis for the administration's justification for continued bombing. Every time Johnson ordered a partial halt to the bombardment, the North Vietnamese invariably countered that they would not be coerced into talking, that the bombing had to be halted, unconditionally, before they would agree to discuss prospects for peace. Over the course of the previous year the White House had expended some effort to understand just how 'unconditional' that demand was, but always with frustrating

44 Ibid.

45 Johnson, Vantage Point, p. 267.

results.⁴⁶

The frustration was due in part, no doubt, to the conflicting signals which the U.S. often sent out. The San Antonio address was no different. Despite the President's memoirs, which recall the San Antonio formulation as 'new,' a different image of Johnson's intent was conveyed just one day after delivering the speech. When questioned at an LBJ ranch news conference on September 30 as to whether the formulation of the bombing-talks arrangement was in fact new, Johnson replied:

I will let that speech stand for itself...[t]he statement last night has been made before, It was made, as I said, time and time again, it was made in recent press conferences...when I made substantially the same statement. It represents official Government policy, namely, that we are trying every way we can to find any way to sit down at any time, any place, with these people and talk about the possibilities of peace...I did not intend last night---I did not feel that I had any requirement to submit only new material....I did not mean that I felt the criteria of the speech had to be [sic] something new in it.⁴⁷

Throughout the Fall, the administration was forced to confront several unpleasant realities: the aerial campaign,

⁴⁶ See Memo, Rostow to the President, October 20, 1967, filed in "Vietnam 6E 10/67-5/68, Bombing Pause Discussion by U.S." and Memo, Rostow to the President "Negotiating Attempts on Vietnam, December 29, 1967 with "The Record of Vietnam Peace Bids, no author, filed in "Vietnam 6C Peace Initiatives: General International Initiatives (Retrospective Accounts) 1961-1968." National Security File Country File Vietnam, Box 95, LBJ Library.

⁴⁷ Presidential News Conference from LBJ Ranch: September 30, 1967. Public Papers: LBJ, 1967, book II, pp. 883-4.

which consumed the lion's share of public debate over the war, had over the two and one half years of its operation, failed to reduce the flow of men and supplies from the North to the South in any meaningful sense, and further, had failed to demonstrate any success in breaking the enemy of his will to continue the struggle. Moreover, progress in the Pacification program came slower than expected.⁴⁸ And in the United States, the number of the Americans opposed to the war was steadily increasing and the press and opposition leaders in Congress no longer allowed the administration to discharge even the smallest element of its war policies unscrutinized.⁴⁹

As the most visible aspect of administration policy, the bombing had become the focal point for domestic opposition to the war. While those who opposed bombing on moral grounds and those who felt the United States should deal North Vietnam a massively destructive aerial blow lay at the extremes of the debate, the intense frustration with Rolling Thunder centered around its utility. The enormous cost and destructive power of raid after raid had failed to bring the war any closer to a conclusion, and this demonstrated infeasibility brought the desirability of the program into serious question. Many felt the war could only be concluded

⁴⁸ On the slow pace of Pacification, see Carroll Kilpatrick, "Gains Gradual In Pacification, Komer Reports," Washington Post, November 22, 1967, p. A8.

⁴⁹ By October, Johnson had a domestic approval rating of only 38%. Gallup Opinion Index 29 (November 1967), p. 2.

through a negotiated settlement and the North would not negotiate unless there was an unconditional halt to the bombing. To get any progress toward concluding the war, the bombing had to cease.

This view was opposed by the military leadership and conservative Senators who objected to halts or pauses in the the bombing because they believed it gave the North the opportunity to reinforce and refit its troops in the South; a move which would ultimately lead to heavier American casualties. Among this group were hardliners who, unpersuaded that negotiations were worthwhile, believed that only military victory would secure U.S. objectives in Vietnam. They were joined in this view, not surprisingly, by the South Vietnamese government.

The Thieu regime knew that compromise with the North would require accommodating, to some measure, the NLF Communists in the South. From their view this, of course, was impossible. Fighting was the only way out.

The press and opposition groups began to weigh the toll of the war against the official estimates of progress and future success.⁵⁰ The discrepancies they highlighted widened the administration's 'credibility gap' even further. Within

⁵⁰ See, for example, William Tuohy, "Newsmen's View of Viet War Fails to Match U.S. Optimism," The Los Angeles Times, October 29, 1967, pp. 1, 10; and Ward Just, "The Heart-Mind Gap In the Vietnam War," Washington Post, November 19, 1967, pp. B1-2.

government too, dissent which had been stewing quietly for some months began cautiously bubbling to the surface. Long pessimistic, analysts in Washington at DoD, the State Department, and CIA vented their misgivings in a series of departmental studies and reports.⁵¹

State Department experts challenged the official claims of progress and the justification that the U.S. was fighting in Vietnam to defend against the expansion of Chinese Communism.⁵² They did not share the view of their Secretary whose words at a December press conference evoked the image of a menacing Chinese dragon poised to attack nations whom the United States did not defend.⁵³ They saw, despite the

⁵¹ Of two major studies in the two major studies conducted in the Department of Defense in the Fall of 1967---JCS's "Study of the Political-Military Implications in South East Asia of the Cessation of Aerial Bombardment and the Initiation of Negotiations," (SEA CABIN) and IDA's JASON division report, the latter is clearly more critical of the bombing campaign. For a discussion of the SEA CABIN and JASON studies see, Pentagon Papers, IV, pp. 217-25.

⁵² See for example, Gelb and Betts, Irony of Vietnam, pp. 167-8

⁵³ Dean Rusk news conference of October 12, 1967. "...there will be a billion Chinese on the Mainland, armed with nuclear weapons, with no certainty about what their attitude toward the rest of Asia will be...the free nations of Asia...don't want China to overrun them on the basis of a doctrine of the world revolution...we are not picking out Peking as some sort of special enemy. Peking has nominated itself by proclaiming a militant doctrine of the world revolution, and doing something about it." (Pentagon Papers, IV, pp. 681-2). His words were echoed by Vice-President Humphrey in Doylestown, Pennsylvania on October 15 who said that world peace was threatened by a "...militant, aggressive Asian community, with its headquarters in Peking China...[t]he threat to our security is in Asia. And we are

hostile rhetoric of Mao Tse Tung, a nation whose domestic problems threatened the country with self-collapse. CIA analysts in Washington generally shared this view. Their skepticism regarding the purpose for which the U.S. was fighting, coupled with their grim assessment of the progress that had been made, directly countered the reports from CIA elements in Saigon.⁵⁴ However, the assessments of these second and third-tier officials did not persuade senior policy makers who in these months were preoccupied with diffusing criticism from outside the administration.

November saw repeated illustrations of the differences between official administration positions on the war and the reports of the media. Government officials continued to insist that positive progress was steadily being made, while the news media in the Capital, fueled by reports from the hundreds of newsmen on the ground in Vietnam, claimed otherwise. U.S. offices in Saigon buttressed the optimistic claims of the White House with a maze of official cables and reports which did lead one toward optimism (though they often appeared irreconcilable---with calls for increased resources

fighting there not only for the Vietnamese, but for ourselves and the future of our country."

⁵⁴ Hoopes, Limits of Intervention, pp. 94-5. The stark difference between Washington and Saigon groups of both the State Department and CIA would resurface again under Nixon, particularly during the reassessment of Vietnam policy which occurred in the formative months of his administration.

juxtaposed with claims of improving conditions.) By official measurement, the cumulative effect of the military's effort in South Vietnam was having the desired effects. American casualty rates were leveling off and declining, the influx of new technology and improved tactics combined for more effective ground operations, 'free elections' had been held in the South (though admittedly with less than desired results), and the ARVN was showing signs of growing competence.⁵⁵

The view from the media could hardly have been more disparate. Reporters 'on the ground,' saw no evidence that the North was easing up through a loss of will. Saigon was as corrupt as ever, and the ARVN remained all but completely ineffectual. By revealing the 'truthful details', as they saw them, the media implicitly claimed sole authority to relate the accurate story of Vietnam, often rejecting out of hand, official press releases and battle accounts.⁵⁶ The

⁵⁵ See the memoranda filed in "ND 19/CO 312 Vietnam-Situation In," National Security File, Confidential File Country File Vietnam, ND 19/CO 312 October-December, 1967, Box 73, LBJ Library.

⁵⁶ See Neil Sheehan's penetrating biography of former Army Lieutenant Colonel John Paul Vann for the fantastically disparate images and attitudes toward the war which developed between Washington and officials with extended time in country. A Bright Shining Lie (New York: Random House, 1988). See also Pentagon Papers, IV, p. 455, Hoopes, Limits of Intervention, p. 98-104.

For interesting discussions of some of the factors which reportedly biased media coverage of the war on the ground in Vietnam, see, Kathleen Turner, Lyndon Johnson's Dual War: Vietnam and the Press (Chicago: University of Chicago Press,

media, capitalizing upon and, to a degree, providing the basis for a growing mistrust of official reports of progress in the war, slowly gained the upper hand in the credibility war waged on the home front, giving shape to the changing political will of the nation.

The administration tried to counter by emphasizing, as it had all year, positive progress in the war.⁵⁷ Ambassador Bunker and General Westmoreland were recalled from Saigon to

1985), pp. 218-219. Later, in an analysis of the media coverage of the Tet Offensive of 1968, Peter Braestrup, correspondent for The Washington Post and The New York Times would write: "...the collective emanations of the major media were producing a kind of continuous black fog of their own, a vague conventional 'disaster' image, which few newsmen attempted to reexamine and which few news managers at home sought to question. Indeed, in the case of Newsweek, NBC, and CSB, and of photo displays by others, the disaster theme seemed to be exploited for its own sake." The Big Story: How the American Press and Television Reported and Interpreted the Crisis of Tet 1968 in Vietnam and Washington. 2 volumes (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1977), vol. 1, p. 706 [hereafter referred to as The Big Story]. For Braestrup's general assessment of the factors that influenced reporting on the war, see volume 1, pp. 705-728.

⁵⁷ For a sampling of official remarks which portrayed generally positive progress in the war see, for example: Johnson's new conference of August 18 (Public Papers: LBJ, 1967, book II, pp. 788-796), and address before the National Legislative Conference in San Antonio, September 29 (Public Papers: LBJ, 1967, book II, pp. 878-9). On LBJ's general optimism regarding U.S. progress, see the news conferences of November 1 and November 17 (Public Papers: LBJ, 1967, book II, pp. 971 and 1049, respectively); and Joint Statement following discussions in Canberra with President Thieu (Public Papers: LBJ, 1967, book II, p. 1180). See also Pentagon Papers, IV, p. 228, and Larry Berman, Lyndon Johnson's War (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1989), especially pp. 114-138.

assist in the effort. In a major publicized address to the National Press Club, Westmoreland observed emphatically: "I am absolutely certain that whereas in 1965 the enemy was winning, today he is certainly losing."⁵⁸ Appearing shortly thereafter with Bunker on television, the General reported that the war effort was at the point where the "...the end [had become] to come into view."⁵⁹ Even William Bundy, normally one to shun public exposure, optimistically observed that there was "...light at the end of the tunnel."⁶⁰ In truth, little had changed on the battlefield to warrant these sweeping claims. And despite the administration's concerted effort to put a winning face on the war, the press continued its unrelenting criticism.

Johnson became even more galvanized in his conviction that he would not be saddled with the responsibility for having lost the war and relaxed some restrictions which he had

⁵⁸ Quoted in the Washington Post, November 22, 1967, p. A6. For an example of the media reaction to the speech, see George C. Wilson "War's End in View, Says Westmoreland," Washington Post, November 22, 1967, pp. 1, A6; James Reston, "Washington: Why Westmoreland and Bunker are Optimistic," New York Times, November 22, 1967, p. 46; and Chalmers M. Roberts, "General's Timetable Calls for Victory After '68 Voting," Washington Post, November 22, 1967, p. A8.

⁵⁹ For Westmoreland's recollection of these events, see, A Soldier Reports (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1976), p. 284-5.

⁶⁰ Walter Issacson and Evan Thomas, The Wise Men (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1986), p. 679-680. Little did Bundy, and others, realize that the 'light at the end of the tunnel' was the headlight of the express train coming the other way.

placed on the bombing campaign. On November 15, he briefly lifted the quarantine on bombing of Haiphong and the harbor was attacked for the first time. The military finally had the target they had desired since 1965. If the hardliners were right and Hanoi could be bombed to the negotiating table, this was a firm step in that direction.

Despite this dramatic move, Johnson was clearly losing room in which to maneuver his policies. By November, Gallup polls indicated that 52 percent of Americans polled disapproved of the President's handling of the war, though for reasons tied mainly to the bombing. Paradoxically, these same polls showed that 63% opposed U.S. withdrawal from South Vietnam, and that same 63% thought the U.S. 'should either continue or step up the fighting in Vietnam.'⁶¹

In Congress, Senate moderates such as Case of New Jersey, and Morton and Cooper from Kentucky criticized the President for what they called "irresponsible escalation" of the war, and lent their names to the ranks of those calling for negotiations and the U.S. to take the first step to de-escalate the conflict by halting the bombing of the North. Johnson could ill-afford this erosion of Congressional support, and he countered by 'going public' with his dilemma in a masterful appearance at a televised news conference on November 17.

⁶¹ Gallup Opinion Index 30 (December 1967), pp. 2, 39.

When asked for his assessment of U.S. 'progress and prospects in Vietnam,' Johnson gave an emotional response:

Our American people, when we get in a contest of any kind...want it decided and decided quickly; get in or get out. They like that curve to rise like this [indicating a sharp rise] and they like the opposition to go down like this [indicating a sharply declining line]. That is not the kind of war we are fighting in Vietnam...it doesn't move that fast...we are moving more like this [indicating gradual rise]. They are moving more like this [indicating decline]...We are making progress. We are pleased with the results that we are getting. We are inflicting greater losses than we are taking...overall we are making progress. We are satisfied with that progress. Our allies are pleased with that progress...⁶²

Johnson received glowing marks for his performance in part because he truly believed progress was being made, not only in the ground war, but in other areas as well. The Thieu regime, appearing to make strides toward stabilization in Saigon gave Johnson cause for optimism. His beliefs were reinforced by the supportive words of his political intimates and the plethora of memoranda, reports, and studies which made their guided way to his desk.⁶³

Perhaps because its air war was under such sustained criticism and the fact that it was largely distinct, in the

⁶² Public Papers: LBJ, 1967, book II, pp. 1048-9, clarification original.

⁶³ See the discussion in Pentagon Papers, IV, pp. 228-232. See also CINCPAC Measurement of Progress in Southeast Asia as of 31 December 1967 (CINCPAC ser: 00404-68 23 February 1968) filed in "Vietnam 2 C (7) General Military Activity," contained in Declassified and Sanitized Documents From Unprocessed Files (DSDUF) Vietnam, Box 70, LBJ Library.

minds of many, from the efforts on the ground, the Administration rarely cited the results of bombing raids in its public pronouncements on the war, opting instead to use reports from the ground war to structure its public claims of the war's general progress. Intentionally or not, the result of such a strategy---the formulation of official postures by 'trading off' between air and ground operations---presented often in vague impressionistic language, created the overall effect of painting an optimistic portrait of U.S. progress in the war.⁶⁴ For this, however, it somehow became obscured that the administration's optimism reflected the combination of two factors: the institutional biases of a professional military naturally desirous of victory; and an increasingly smaller circle of advisers whose collective loyalty to the President and awe of his presence within an executive administration burdened with the responsibility for the war,

⁶⁴ See, for example, Pentagon Papers, IV, p. 217. A sense of the administration's optimism can be had from other remarks of the President at that November news conference, Public Papers: LBJ, 1967, book II, pp. 1045-1055. In addition to the media accounts cited earlier, see also Roy Reed, "Bunker Sees President; Predicts Saigon Gain in '68," New York Times, November 14, 1967, pp. 1, 3; Carroll Kilpatrick, "Westmoreland Sees U.S. Phaseout in '69," Washington Post, November 17, 1967, pp. 1, A6; Ward Just, "The Heart-Mind Gap in the Vietnam War, Washington Post, November 19, 1967, pp. B1-2; Peter Grose, "War of Attrition Called Effective by Westmoreland," New York Times November 20, 1967, pp. 1, 4. Johnson recalls the his own upbeat view of the situation in Vantage Point, pp. 261, 376. See also Walt W. Rostow, Diffusion of Power (New York: Macmillan, 1972), pp. 452, 457; and "Vietnam: War Tide Turning to U.S.?", U.S. News and World Report, November 27, 1967, pp. 50-53.

had clear interests in stressing the positive effects of its policies.⁶⁵

In truth, Johnson's was a troubled administration. The effects of quiet policy divisions within the ranks of his advisers, highlighted by McNamara's appearance before the Stennis committee, emerged in plain view when, on November 28 in a move that surprised even McNamara, Johnson announced the nomination of his Defense Secretary to the chairmanship of the World Bank.⁶⁶

⁶⁵ By December 1967, those who were closest to the President advising him on Vietnam offered little more than reassurances that the President's policies were correct and appropriate. Significantly, these advisers shared two distinguishing characteristics---the conviction that Johnson's policies were right, and the fact that nearly all been involved in the major decision-making since 1964. The experience of the war and Johnson's personality had trimmed their numbers and galvanized their dependency on each other. On the relationship between Johnson and his advisers, see George Christian, The President Steps Down, pp. 9-10, 15; Hubert Humphrey, The Education of a Public Man (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1976), p. 325; and Doris Kearns, Lyndon Johnson and the American Dream, pp. 318-323.

⁶⁶ Interview with Alain Enthoven, May 4, 1988. Enthoven recalled that McNamara summoned him and a colleague to his office to learn what they knew of the World Bank. McNamara's conversation and manner clearly indicated to his assistants his surprise at the move. See also Hoopes, Limits of Intervention, pp. 90-1. See also, Richard Harwood, "McNamara Nominated to World Bank: Resignation Date Still Undecided," Washington Post, November 28, 1967, pp. 1, A7; Carroll Kilpatrick and Chalmers M. Roberts, "McNamara Job Shift Stirs Capital," Washington Post, November 29, 1967, pp. 1, 4; Chalmers M. Roberts, "McNamara Curtain Lifts After an Ordeal of Silence," Washington Post, November 30, 1967, pp. 1, A8; Carroll Kilpatrick, "Questions Persist on McNamara Move," Washington Post, December 1, 1967, pp. 1, A7; and George C. Wilson, "No Intention to Change War, Joint Chief's Chairman Says," Washington Post, November 30, 1967, p. A10.

Unforeseen political ramifications of the besieged policy also became manifest at this time. Only two days later, while the press was awash in speculation over McNamara's move, Eugene McCarthy announced that he would challenge LBJ for the Democratic nomination for President and the Senate voted unanimously to urge the President to seek a solution to the war through the United Nations.⁶⁷

Over these months, Johnson reacted to the increasing unrest by adopting a stance of the besieged leader at war, drawing an example from others who had shared his position and his predicament---Abraham Lincoln, Woodrow Wilson, and Franklin Roosevelt. He used more than one public occasion to tutor the press:

There has always been confusion, frustration and difference of opinion when there is a war going on....I don't have to remind you of what happened in the Civil War. People were here in the White House begging Lincoln to concede and to work out a deal with the Confederacy when word came of his victories...you know what Roosevelt went through, and President Wilson in World War I...[n]ow when you look back upon it, there are very few people who would think that Wilson, Roosevelt or Truman were in error. We are going to have this criticism. We are going to have this

⁶⁷ Warren Weaver, Jr., "M'Carthy to Fight Johnson Policies in 5 or 6 Primaries, New York Times, December 1, 1967, pp. 1, 40; Andrew J. Glass, "McCarthy Plans to Oppose LBJ in 4 to 6 States: Seeks to Take Vietnam Issue to the People," Washington Post, December 1, 1967, pp. 1, A4; David S. Broder, "RFK Test Seen," Washington Post, December 1, 1967, pp. 1, A4; and Robert C. Albright, "Senate Asks Bid to U.N. to Seek Vietnam Peace," Washington Post, December 1, 1967, pp. 1, A4.

difference...⁶⁸

In acknowledging the debate Johnson felt confident he held the right position. Earlier in November, he had called upon a select group of former diplomats, soldiers, governmental officials, and senior statesmen to get their views on his policies and the prospects for success. Officially referred to as the Senior Advisory Group on Vietnam, the 'Wise Men,' as they were generally known, assembled on November first and second to receive a series of briefings both on the military situation and the diplomatic overtures which the administration had pursued in the interest of peace.⁶⁹ The

⁶⁸ LBJ Press Conference November 17, 1967, Public Papers: LBJ, 1967, book II, p. 1051. Illustrations of Johnson's own actions within a larger historical context occur throughout his memoirs. See for example, pp. 103-4, 323-4, and 553 in The Vantage Point.

⁶⁹ Present at these meetings were: Dean Acheson, Secretary of State under Truman; George Ball, former Undersecretary of State and resident 'dove' of the administration; General of the Army Omar Bradley; McGeorge Bundy, LBJ's former National Security Adviser; Clark Clifford, close personal adviser to the President; Douglas Dillon, former Secretary of the Treasury under Kennedy; Arthur Dean, US armistice negotiator in Korea; Abe Fortas, Associate Justice of the Supreme Court; Henry Cabot Lodge, former US Ambassador to Vietnam; Robert Murphy, former senior State Department official under Eisenhower; and Maxwell Taylor, former Army General and Ambassador to Vietnam under Kennedy. See "[November 1, 1967 Meeting of Foreign Policy Advisors (President did not attend)]," and "[November 2, 1967 Meeting with Foreign Policy Advisors on Vietnam]" in White House Central Files, Meeting Notes File, Box 2, September 1, 1967-April 29, 1968, LBJ Library. There are several accounts of the role of the 'Wise Men' during November 1967. See, for example, Schandler, Unmaking of a President, pp. 64-5, Issacson and Thomas, Wise Men, pp. 676-681; and Maxwell D. Taylor, Swords and Plowshares (New York: W.W. Norton, 1972), pp. 377-8.

reaction of the group was supportive. General Omar Bradley urged Johnson to remain steadfast in prosecuting the war and Clark Clifford assured the President that the war was indeed 'right and necessary.'⁷⁰ Johnson felt reassured. Leaving the meeting he noted "a sense of clarity and calmness in the group;" he would press on.⁷¹

By year's end, U.S. troops in Southeast Asia numbered approximately five hundred thousand, American casualties exceeded twenty thousand, and the prospects for victory were as uncertain as ever. The tonnage of ordnance delivered over North Vietnam had long ceased to defy accounting, but North Vietnam demonstrated no lack of wherewithal to continue the fight---their material losses apparently made up by the Soviet Union and China. At home, the media, community leaders, prominent scholars, members of Congress and former administration officials joined the ranks of those whose dissatisfaction with the administration's policies compelled them to stand up in opposition.

⁷⁰ When the attendees were questioned about whether the United States should get out of Vietnam, the minutes of the November Meeting record 'unanimous agreement' that the U.S. should stay. Particular comments appear in the complete notes on the Cabinet Room meeting and luncheon with foreign policy advisers on November 2, 1967. Memo, Jim Jones [Assistant to the President] to the President undated, contained in "[November 2, 1967 Meeting with Foreign Policy Advisors on Vietnam]" White House Central Files, Meeting Notes File, Box 2, September 1, 1967-April 29, 1968, LBJ Library.

⁷¹ Issacson and Thomas, The Wise Men, p. 680.

The President fervently believed that the United States had a vital interest in seeing that Vietnam was not lost to Communism, and Johnson persisted in his belief that the North would eventually wither in the face of the clear military superiority of the United States. A dwindling cast of advisers with consonant views supported the President. Triumph on the battlefield would eventually vindicate his policies, and these thoughts made the burden of policy dissent within his nation bearable. But Johnson knew only too keenly that his country was torn by this war; victory though coming, had to come soon.

In the rest of the country, however the hard questions being asked as winter set in, revolved around the issue of whether the U.S. was, in fact, winning the war. Indeed, if the United States was not fighting to impose military defeat on North Vietnam, what would it take to force Hanoi to cease its aggression in the South?⁷² What would it take to end this war?

⁷² That the United States did not seek the military defeat of North Vietnam was made repeatedly in official statements. See, for example, the statement by U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations Arthur J. Goldberg on October 10, 1966. "...We do not seek to overthrow the Government of North Vietnam...we do not ask of North Viet-Nam an unconditional surrender or indeed the surrender of anything that belongs to it..." (for excerpts of this and other official justifications for the war, see Pentagon Papers, IV, pp. 626-684.) See also the testimony of Admiral U.S. Grant Sharp at the Stennis committee hearings in August 1967. Air War Against North Vietnam, part 1, p. 5.

The Winds of Change

On December 29, 1967, North Vietnamese Foreign Minister Nguyen Duy Trinh announced that Hanoi 'would' hold talks with the United States once the U.S. had ended the bombing and 'all other acts of war.' U.S. officials attempted to diminish the significance of the remark, but this formulation did represent a change from earlier pronouncements in which North Vietnam had indicated that a bombing cessation 'could' lead to talks.⁷³ In a less publicized response to Trinh's statement, perhaps to test the extent of Hanoi's sincerity, LBJ reinstituted a bombing prohibition within five nautical miles of Hanoi and Haiphong. Further, in his State of the Union Message to Congress, the President relaxed U.S. expectations for negotiations, calling for 'serious' negotiations instead of 'productive talks' as he had in San Antonio. But in that same speech, perhaps to placate Senate hawks who feared that the President was going 'soft', Johnson also cautioned North Vietnam '...not to take advantage of our restraint as they [had] in the past.' Because the announced bombing limitation was combined with the President's harsh words, it probably sent confusing signals to Hanoi. They

⁷³ See the transcripts of "Foreign Minister's Interview with Australian Journalist Wilfred Burchett" Hanoi VNA International Service in English 0150 GMT 28 January 1967, and "Trinh: Talks Will Follow U.S. War Acts Halt," delivered 29 December 1967, Hanoi VNA International Service in English, 1603 GMT, 1 January 1968, filed in "7 I 1954-1968 Documents Pertinent to the War and Its Genesis," National Security File, Country File Vietnam, Box 103, LBJ Library.

responded in late January by rejecting the San Antonio formulation as a 'habitual trick' of the Johnson administration.⁷⁴

This exchange, as others before, reveals how complex political relationships within nations can influence relations between belligerents at war.

In the United States, Senate hawks and the military exerted nearly constant demands on the White House that the U.S. assume a more aggressive stance in the war. They called for full mobilization and fewer restrictions in the air war. Other Congressmen, however, reacting to the 47% of the American people dissatisfied with the President's handling of the war, desired no additional troop deployments prior to the Presidential elections in the Fall.⁷⁵ Johnson responded to these conflicting pressures by resisting calls that the air war be completely halted while at the same time refusing to authorize troop deployments in the numbers which current force levels could not support. The President's dilemma was familiar: control the costs of the war without appearing unsupportive of the military.

Accusations that the United States shouldered too much of the war effort added to the domestic friction. To diffuse this criticism the administration quietly pressured the Thieu

⁷⁴ Pentagon Papers, IV, p. 233.

⁷⁵ Gallup Opinion Index, February, 1968, p. 3; Hoopes, Limits of Intervention, p. 117.

government to draft Vietnamese men in the 18-20 year old cohort, and Westmoreland announced that 1968 would see a greater share of the war burden borne by the South Vietnamese.⁷⁶ And to counter allegations that South Vietnam was an unworthy and corrupt ally, Saigon began a highly publicized drive to clean house and improve its efficiency and relationship with the population.

None of the initiatives was new, however, and few informed observers held real hope that these actions would result in meaningful progress toward drawing the war to a close. A wearying sense developed that 'more of the same' was about all the Johnson administration could manage.

In his 1968 State of Union message delivered January 17, the President had reiterated the theme that progress was being made in the war: "...elections have been held in Vietnam...the enemy has been defeated in battle after battle...the number of South Vietnamese living in areas under Government protection has grown..."⁷⁷ The Republicans

⁷⁶ COMUSMACV message dated 091633Z February. National Security File, National Security Council History March 31st Speech, Boxes 47-49 [hereafter referred to as NSC History of the March 31 Decision], LBJ Library. Unless otherwise specified, all message traffic cited is contained, largely in chronological order, in the folders marked vol. 1 through 4 in Boxes 47 and 48. See also, Executive Summary, p. 14, contained in "March 31st Speech, vol. 1," Box 47. In his memoirs, Westmoreland does not acknowledge Washington's pressure on Saigon to mobilize, representing it rather as an independent decision. A Soldier Reports, p. 406.

⁷⁷ Public Papers: LBJ, 1968-69, book I, pp. 25-33.

countered with their own televised 'State of the Union,' in which Senator John Tower of Texas castigated the 'self-defeating policy of gradualism' followed by the Johnson administration and urged a more aggressive policy with an increase in the bombing raids.⁷⁸

The growing domestic debate on the war continued to center on the bombing. The military pressed the fact that bombing pauses in the North led to increased American casualties in the South, and opponents challenged this, claiming that the bombing, in addition to being morally reprehensible, simply was not getting the job done. In a lengthy memo to McNamara in mid-January 1968 Townsend Hoopes, Undersecretary of the Air Force, argued stridently for a bombing cessation. Claiming that "only the most tenuous relationship" existed between bombing cessations and increased American casualties and arguing for a new ground strategy in the interest of reducing U.S. casualties, Hoopes wrote:

A decision to halt the bombing would accordingly seem to require a corollary decision to alter the ground force strategy [but there are] political difficulties [with this switch]. Abandonment of

⁷⁸ These words, however, did not reflect the majority sentiment of his party. In reality the Republicans were keenly divided over just what the best policy for dealing with the war should be. Some, like Senators John Cooper of Kentucky and Jacob Javits of New York, favored a negotiated settlement to the war, while hard liners, represented by the position of Senator Tower, believed the war should be brought to a conclusion through the application of decisive military means, such as an intensified bombing campaign. See Terry Dietz, Republicans and Vietnam: 1961-1968 (New York: Greenwood Press, 1986), pp. 130-1.

the extreme aspects of the present strategy of attrition would require a more explicit acknowledgement than now exists that military victory is not in the cards...To the charge that such a de-escalatory shift would yield control of large pieces of territory to the Viet Cong, the answer must be that much territory claimed by the allies is in fact held so fleetingly and superficially as to constitute no control...owing to the political linkage between the bombing of the North and U.S. casualties in the South...our highly discretionary ground strategy is a major obstacle to a bombing cessation...if the [administration] wishes to be free to decide the bombing issue on its merits, it cannot avoid coming to grips, concurrently, with the need to arrest and reduce U.S. casualties through a significant scaling-down of the ground war.⁷⁹

Hoopes' memo also addressed the fringes of a far less conspicuous, though certainly no less fervent debate within the administration concerning a general troop mobilization. Mobilization involved a call-up of Reserve and National Guard forces for duty to reinforce regular units fighting in Vietnam or as strategic back-up in the event of other international crises. Johnson had long ago decided against ordering a wartime mobilization of this nation's able-bodied manpower, considering it politically costly and economically undesirable.

Senior commanders categorically opposed this decision. They believed that the President's position threatened the military's ability to meet contingencies world wide, and

⁷⁹ Memo from Hoopes to McNamara, January 18, 1968. Cited in Hoopes, Limits of Intervention, pp. 132-3. McNamara did not solicit this memo from Hoopes, and Hoopes does not indicate if the Secretary of the Air Force, Harold Brown, concurred in its content.

ultimately worked against an expedient military solution in Vietnam. By putting the nation on a war-time footing through a general mobilization, the generals believed the war could be brought to a successful and more rapid conclusion. They were unsuccessful in persuading the President to relent, however, and had to settle for piecemeal increases in the numbers of soldiers sent to combat.⁸⁰

The President's continued resistance to ordering a full mobilization for war reflected several considerations: his desire to avoid national distraction from domestic programs, his sensitivity to the increasing public dissatisfaction with the war (dissatisfaction which the Johnson believed would only intensify if more soldiers were sent to Vietnam), and his recollection of the experience of President Kennedy during the Berlin Crisis of 1961. In response to the construction of the Berlin Wall in August of that year, Kennedy had called up the Reserves but had never ordered their deployment, and this move was later soundly criticized

⁸⁰ It is interesting to note that though deployments were made incrementally, the total numbers of troops on the ground in Vietnam reflect a nearly 2,200% increase over the four year period from the end of 1964 to the end of 1968:

End of Year U.S. Forces Strength

1964	23,310
1965	124,310
1966	385,300
1967	485,600
1968	536,000

(Stanton, Vietnam Order of Battle, p. 333.)

as having been unnecessary. Johnson wanted to avoid a similar charge.

Though Johnson feared the worst, the reaction of the general public to a mobilization was actually hard to gauge. Polling data indicated that the public clearly opposed sending additional American troops in combat (possibly because it was felt that this action led to increased American casualties), but that same public opposed a unilateral withdrawal from Vietnam.⁸¹ The policy dilemma was real, and few in Government could offer any solutions. The bombing therefore, continued, simply because no real alternative presented itself.⁸²

Mounting domestic dissatisfaction with the war reflected that in a profoundly fundamental sense the conflict had begun to lose its legitimacy. Objections had arisen on several fronts. First, if the United States had gone into Vietnam to contain Chinese or Soviet Communism, the emerging reality that the U.S. confronted less of a threat than originally

⁸¹ Richard A. Brody and Sidney Verba, "Hawk and Dove: The Search for an Explanation of Vietnam Policy Preferences," Acta Politica 7 (July 1972): 285-322; pp. 310-11.

⁸² Everett M. Dirksen, a prominent Republican Senator from Illinois who often advanced the conservative critique of Johnson's handling of the war observed in a January 14, 1968 interview: "What are we going to do other than what the President is doing right now? We can't retreat, we can't pull out and we can't get the other side to negotiate." (New York Times, January 15, 1968, p. 5)

imagined, seriously weakened this justification.⁸³ Moreover, the daily reports of destruction from aerial bombardment had begun to generate a vague moral unease among the public. Coldly efficient, the bombers passed repeatedly over North and South Vietnam, often not even seeing their targets but wreaking untold destruction. As people came to learn more of the air war, principally through media accounts, an impression of indiscriminate and impersonal warfare entirely disarticulated from the political objectives of the war developed---and the political objectives were, to many, themselves ambiguous. Finally, it appeared that the administration's style of Vietnam policy-making offered nothing beyond restatements of existing programs. Unable to devise a policy that would yield decisive results on the battlefield and yet be politically acceptable to the American people, the White House waited and hoped for something to break in the war. It did not have long to wait.

On January 23, North Korean patrol boats seized an American intelligence vessel, the USS Pueblo, in the Sea of Japan,

83 With the exception of certain top-level officials, notably Dean Rusk, the notion that the ideological significance of the Soviet Union and China in Vietnam was less important than their material support to the North Vietnamese began to emerge as early as the Summer of 1967. The view of undifferentiated, expansionist Communism gave way to a sophisticated understanding of the truly complex Soviet-Vietnamese, Sino-Vietnamese and Sino-Soviet relationships. See, for example, Pentagon Papers, IV, pp. 484-6. Gelb and Betts, Irony of Vietnam, pp. 269-70.

claiming it had violated North Korean waters. This action came only a few days after North Korean irregulars attempted a raid on the official residence of South Korean President Park. These incidents combined with generally strained relations between North and South Korea to unnerve Seoul. The U.S., however, could take little meaningful action. Bugged down in Vietnam, the President had few military options. In a limited show of force, a number of aircraft were sent to U.S. bases in South Korea, and nearly 15,000 reservists were mobilized in the United States to replace the deployed units. Addressing the nation on January 26, the President condemned the action of North Korea and alluded to diplomatic efforts underway to get the vessel back.⁸⁴ But the administration hardly had time to dwell on this crisis. Four days later, in Vietnam, the truce declared for the Vietnamese Lunar New Year, Tet, was shattered as the Communists launched a sweeping and unprecedented attack on South Vietnam.

The Communist Tet Offensive was a massive, multiple front assault on major South Vietnamese towns and cities. Viet Cong sappers infiltrated the U.S. Embassy grounds in Saigon and U.S. marines defending the compound required additional paratroopers to stave off the attack. Fighting erupted in every province of South Vietnam, from Quang Tri in the north

⁸⁴ See the folder "Pueblo" in the Files of George Christian, Box 4, LBJ Library.

to Quan Long in the south. Hanoi had hoped that by achieving surprise they would achieve a decisive military advantage, which, coupled with an expected uprising of the South Vietnamese people against the Thieu regime, would compel the U.S. to withdraw its forces and depart the country.⁸⁵

As a strategy for victory however, the Tet Offensive was a complete failure for the North. Within twenty-four hours of the initial assaults nearly every Communist advance was reversed. No spontaneous general uprising occurred, and Viet Cong forces suffered irreparable damage. Though heavy fighting continued for some weeks, the main thrust of the offensive was broken.

On February second the President held a news conference stressing the degree to which the Communist offensive had failed.⁸⁶ Tet did, in fact, represent a clear battlefield victory for U.S. and South Vietnamese forces, and the performance of the ARVN surprised even American military officials who had been harboring grave doubts regarding their ability to withstand the rigors of combat.⁸⁷ But the

⁸⁵ On the Tet Offensive see Don Oberdorfer, Tet!, especially chapter 2 for background material on the view from the North; Rostow, Diffusion of Power, p. 460; David R. Palmer, Summons of the Trumpet (New York: Ballentine, 1984), Herbert Schandler, The Unmaking of a President, especially chapter 4; and Tran Van Don, Our Endless War (Novato, California: Presidio Press, 1978), pp. 174-176.

⁸⁶ Public Papers: LBJ, 1968-1969, book I, p. 155-163.

⁸⁷ See, for example, the discussion in Pentagon Papers,

administration's reports of victory were lost in the domestic furor that erupted in the wake of Tet.

The fact that the North was able to mount an offensive of the size and scope it did completely undermined claims that the administration had been making all along of significant progress in the war. Graphic images of the embassy assault, the battle for Hue, and the siege of Khe Sanh conveyed to the public by the media, stunned the American public and made official optimism appear foolish.⁸⁸ Though the administration had anticipated an enemy action for some months, the public simply was not prepared for the dramatic scenes of Tet. As one analyst observed, Tet had become a "...symbol of how

IV, pp. 398-9. Schandler, Unmaking of a President, p. 78.

88 The dramatic photograph of the head of South Vietnam's national police summarily executing a Vietcong terrorist (carried on the front page of the February 2, 1968 New York Times) remains an indelible image of the war. See also, "Embassy Attack a Fight to Death," New York Times, February 1, 1968, p. 14; Charles Mohr, "Hue is Embattled: Other Cities Besieged-Allies Bomb Foe in Cholon Area," New York Times, February 1, 1968, pp. 1, 14; Gene Roberts, "Village Endures Night of Terror," New York Times, February 1, 1968, pp. 1, 14; Charles Mohr, "Offensive is 'Running Out of Steam,' Says Westmoreland," New York Times, February 2, 1968, pp. 1, 12; Carroll Kilpatrick, "LBJ Calls Uprising Failure: President Sees Repulse of New Drive," Washington Post, February 3, 1968, pp. 1, A10; Sir Robert Komer, "Viet Reds' Drive was a Giap Masterstroke," Washington Post, February 11, 1968, p. A8; "Hanoi Attacks and Scores a Major Blow," and Everett G. Martin, "The Devastating Effect on the People," in Newsweek, February 12, 1968, pp. 23-31, 32, respectively; and Gene Roberts, "Foe's Shells Hit 37 Vietnam Cities and Saigon Field," New York Times, February 18, 1968, pp. 1, 4.

illusory the progress claimed in the war had been."⁸⁹

The military, although anticipating a communist move for some months, were themselves caught off guard by the scope and intensity of the Tet offensive. In an interview years later, General Westmoreland observed: "The extent of this offensive was not known to us, although we did feel it was going to be widespread. The timing was not known...I did not anticipate that they would strike in the cities and make them their targets." Assenting in this, Johnson later wrote:

...Tet was...a shock, in one degree or another, to all of us.. We knew that a show of strength was coming; it was more massive than we had anticipated. We knew that the Communists were aiming at a number of population centers; we did not expect them to attack as many as they did. We knew that the North Vietnamese and the Viet Cong were trying to achieve better coordination of their countrywide moves; we did not believe they would be able to carry out the level of coordination they demonstrated, We expected a large force to attack; it was larger than we had estimated.⁹⁰

The American military puzzled over the assault.⁹¹ As a strategic maneuver, it was a disaster for the Communists, and U.S. officials tried to understand what the North had realistically hoped to gain. Senior commanders simply did not expect so serious a challenge to the overwhelming military superiority of the combined U.S. and South Vietnamese

89 Goodman, The Lost Peace, p. 62.

90 Johnson, Vantage Point, p. 385.

91 Krepinevich, Army and Vietnam, p. 239.

military. Nor did they, knowing that allied forces had clearly defeated the enemy's offensive, expect the domestic backlash in the United States that resulted.⁹²

In the States, the offensive proved to many, that despite repeated aerial bombardment and reported setbacks on the

92 For the domestic impact of the Tet Offensive, particularly on the administration and official Washington, see: Tom Wicker, "Vietcong's Attacks Shock Washington," New York Times, February 2, 1968, pp. 1, 13; Murrey Marder, "U.S. Experts Concede Gain by VC," Washington Post, February 3, 1968, pp. 1, A13; New York Times editorial of February 8, 1968, p. 42; Lee Lescase and Murrey Marder, "U.S. and Vietnam: Test in Battle, Tension at the Top," Washington Post, February 11, 1968, pp. 1, A16, A20; Max Frankel, "A Resolute Stand: President Won't Halt Bombing-Predicts Khesanh Victory," New York Times, February 12, 1968, pp. 1, 12; Walter Lippmann, "A Crumbling Policy," Newsweek, February 12, 1968, p. 21; "Westmoreland Criticized for 'Deluding' Congress," New York Times, February 12, 1968, p. 3; "Mansfield Warns of War Realities," New York Times, February 12, 1968, p. 8; Hugh Sidey, "Shaken Assumptions About the War," Life Magazine, February 16, 1968, p. 32B; "Switches By Press on War Reported," New York Times, February 18, 1968, p. 9; Murrey Marder and Chalmers M. Roberts, "Reds' Offensive Leaves U.S. with Maze of Uncertainties," Washington Post, February 26, 1968, pp. 1, A8; and Warren Unna, "Fulbright Asks Policy Review," Washington Post, February 26, 1968, pp. 1, A9; "Troop Increase 'Probably' Needed, Westmoreland Says," Washington Post, February 26, 1968, pp. 1, A10.

The Marder/Roberts Washington Post article of February 26, 1968, closes with a remarkably prescient observation:

Official Washington agrees, as Secretary of State Dean Rusk recently expressed it, that the Vietnamese war in all its dimensions is now approaching a 'climactic' point. Some others here [in Washington, D.C.] believe that the breaking point could readily come before the presidential election in November-but not necessarily to the advantage of either Mr. Johnson's election chances or his place in history.

ground, the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong were still able to coordinate and conduct a major operation. Tet shattered whatever vision there was that an end to the war could be brought about quickly at the existing level of resource commitment.⁹³ More than this, however, it convinced many that the military effort of the United States thus far in the war had been all but completely ineffective in forcing the North Vietnamese to capitulate.⁹⁴

The irony of the Tet Offensive is that while it led to the establishment of a military advantage for the U.S. and South Vietnamese forces, it dealt a devastating blow to the administration's strategy for fighting the war. In analytic

⁹³ As Henry Kissinger would later note: "...the Tet offensive marked the watershed of the American effort. Henceforth, no matter how effective our actions, the prevalent strategy could no longer achieve its objectives within a period or with the force levels politically acceptable to the American people. This realization caused Washington, for the first time, to put a ceiling on the numbers of troops for Vietnam. Denied the very large additional forces requested, the military command in Vietnam felt obliged to begin a gradual change from its periphery strategy to one concentrating on the protection of populated areas. This made inevitable an eventual commitment to a political solution and marked the beginning of the quest for a negotiated settlement." "The Viet Nam Negotiations," Foreign Affairs 47 (January 1969): 211-34, p. 216.

⁹⁴ The following observation is taken from the Pentagon Papers: "One of the inescapable conclusions of the Tet experience that helped to shape [the] decision [to change strategies] was that as an interdiction measure against the infiltration of men and supplies, the bombing had been a near total failure. Moreover, it had not succeeded in breaking Hanoi's will to continue the fight." (Pentagon Papers IV, p. 232).

terms, the Tet Offensive provided the United States with a clear structural opportunity to press its battlefield advantage and completely destroy the overextended North Vietnamese and Viet Cong forces, thereby forcing Hanoi to capitulate. Yet the United States was unable to capitalize on its advantage. The domestic dissatisfaction with the administration's handling of the war had become too great; just at the moment when conditions appeared to favor a military victory for American and South Vietnamese forces, U.S. domestic constraints on further military involvement reached their peak. The assertions (made then and which can still be heard) that Tet was a decisive military victory for the United States and South Vietnam, proclaim a hollow truth--the overwhelming triumph in the Spring of 1968 did not precipitate an end to the war which reflected that victory. Instead, the domestic aftershock of Tet effectively paralyzed the Johnson White House and instigated a major review of war policy within the administration.

The growing realization that things could simply not go on as they had mobilized the opposition within the government. Paul Nitze, Deputy Secretary of Defense, captured the views of Paul Warnke and other senior DoD officials in an internal memo, writing that the United States could not continue to "reinforce weakness." He called for the Vietnam policy to be evaluated within the larger context of U.S. global

commitments.⁹⁵ The President reacted to the mounting criticism by reaffirming his faith in the military.⁹⁶ Despite his personal feelings and the inside knowledge that Tet had been more disastrous for North Vietnam than the United States, however, the President confronted the real possibility that the U.S. might suffer an embarrassing defeat, and took a firmly aggressive public stance to bolster the political will of the nation.

Amid the crisis surrounding the possible loss of the besieged Khe Sanh, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Wheeler, saw in Tet an opportunity to force Johnson to order a call-up of the Reserves. During February and March 1968, Wheeler and Westmoreland exchanged a series of messages to determine the immediate troop requirements to prevent the loss of the city.⁹⁷ Recognizing that the

⁹⁵ Hoopes, Limits of Intervention, pp. 145-6. See also "More of the Same Won't Do," Newsweek, March 18, 1968, p. 25.

⁹⁶ Johnson recalled: "...I detected among a few advisers a sense of pessimism far deeper than I myself felt. I had much greater confidence in Westmoreland and his staff in Vietnam than many people in Washington, especially Pentagon civilians." Vantage Point, p. 398.

⁹⁷ The White House was very aware of the experience of the French at Dien Bien Phu in 1954, and were more than a little uncomfortable with the obvious parallels that would inevitably be drawn. A number of memos detailing the similarities between the two campaigns appear among the documents of the period. See, for example: Memo, MG William DePuy to Director, Joint Staff, undated, subject: Comparison of the Khe Sanh Campaign with Dien Bien Phu. Filed in "Walt Rostow-Memos to the President, vol. 63, Feb 17-21, 1968, in DSDUF files, Box 3, National Security File, Aides File, LBJ

administration desperately desired to avoid defeat in Khe Sanh, particularly since the timing of the siege coincided with the anniversary of the 1954 Communist victory at Dien Bien Phu, Wheeler urged Westmoreland to request the forces he needed to avoid defeat. "The United States Government is not prepared to accept a defeat in South Vietnam;" he wrote, "In summary, if you need more troops, ask for them."⁹⁸ Westmoreland, who had been reluctant to request additional forces, replied to General Wheeler that he would "...welcome reinforcements at any time they [could] be made available."⁹⁹ But three days later he requested, in far clearer and more urgent terms, an accelerated deployment of forces already programmed: "I now have approximately 500,000 U.S. troops...I have been promised 525,000, which according to present

Library. The siege of Khe Sanh is dramatically covered in "The Dusty Agony of Khe Sanh," Newsweek, March 18, 1968, pp. 28-37.

⁹⁸ CJCS message dated 080448Z February 1968 (NSC History of the March 31 Decision). Wheeler reiterated this advice in a cable sent to Westmoreland the following day: "...my sensing is that the critical phase of the war is upon us, and I do not believe that you should refrain from asking for what you believe is required under the circumstances." CJCS message dated 090021Z February (NSC History of the March 31 Decision).

⁹⁹ COMUSMACV message dated 091633Z February (NSC History of the March 31 Decision). Westmoreland later recalled that "it seemed to me that for political reasons or otherwise, the President and the Joint Chiefs of Staff were anxious to send me reinforcements...My first thought was not to ask for any, but the signals from Washington got stronger." (reported in Schandler, Unmaking of A President, p. 97.)

programs will not materialize until 1969. I need these 525,000 troops now...I therefore urge that there be deployed immediately a marine regiment package and a brigade package of the 82d [Airborne Division] and that the remaining elements of those two divisions be prepared to follow at a later time. Time is of the essence."¹⁰⁰

In response to Westmoreland's 'request,' the JCS forwarded to the President a study detailing its implications. Without the immediate call-up of approximately 120,000 reservists, they reported, deploying troops to Vietnam would leave the United States ill-equipped to handle other contingencies which might arise. This was no trivial concern, as the Pueblo incident so vividly illustrated. In a remarkable action, the JCS recommended against meeting Westmoreland's request. Their memo to the President urged that 'the decision to deploy reinforcements be deferred and that no deployment be made "...without concomitant callup of Reserves sufficient at least to replace those deployed and provide for

¹⁰⁰ COMUSMACV message dated 120612Z February (NSC History of the March 31 Decision). General Maxwell Taylor, when asked by the President for his comments on this cable, replied that he found it "hard to believe that this cable is written by the same man as the preceding one, 091633Z...[t]his new one is clear, crisp and sounds like an unambiguous call for additional help in minimum time." Taylor went on to advise the President to meet Westmoreland's needs. Memo, Taylor to the President, dated February 12, 1968, subject: Comments on General Westmoreland's Cable of February 12, 1968. Filed in "March 31st Speech, ol. 8, Excerpts and Taylor's Memo," in National Security File, NSC History, March 31st Speech, Box 49, LBJ Library.

the increased sustaining base requirements of all Services."¹⁰¹

By recommending against the deployments, the JCS appeared to countermand the very action they had worked so carefully to evoke from Westmoreland. Upon examination, however, this move reflects a subtle attempt by the JCS to overcome the President's intransigence on the mobilization issue. Up to this point in the war, the troops deployed to Vietnam did not reflect the requirements of the battlefield, but rather the numbers which could be supported by existing force levels in the absence of a general mobilization. As noted earlier, Johnson was clearly not sanguine regarding the political repercussions of taking such a step.

Arguments against mobilization were many and varied. State Governors, recalling the unrest of the previous summer, balked at the suggested diversion of National Guard units to combat in Vietnam. In Washington, the position of administration opponents such as Fulbright and Kennedy were well known, but more moderate Congressmen had made it clear that an extensive call-up would not be welcomed in this, an election year. Conservatives, such as Senator Richard

¹⁰¹ Memo, General Earle Wheeler, CJCS, to the President, dated February 27, 1968, subject: Military Situation and Requirements in South Vietnam, contained in "Memos on Vietnam: February-August 1968," and Report of the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, on Situation in Vietnam and MACV Force Requirements, contained in "Memos on Vietnam: February-March 1968," in Papers of Clark Clifford, Box 2, LBJ Library. See also, Pentagon Papers, IV, pp. 541-2.

Russell, the powerful chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, opposed further troop increases in Vietnam unless accompanied by a substantial step-up in the bombing.¹⁰² The President's decision to mobilize troops would clearly mean widening the war, at home---through the inevitable repercussions of a general call-up, and in Vietnam, through a required intensification of the bombing campaign.

The President's political position was becoming tenuous, and decision-making in Vietnam was beginning to have serious implications for Johnson's entire policy agenda. In the 1966 elections the Republicans had gained 50 seats in Congress, weakening the President's political base of support. His policies in Vietnam were eroding that support even further, and the 'Great Society' stood in jeopardy. Johnson could not sell a general mobilization to Congress for an increasingly unpopular war because he could not afford to alienate completely those politicians whose help he needed to implement his domestic program.

The President's Vietnam strategy had been a mixed bag of bombing, troop deployments, and diplomacy designed to keep options open. But the apparent inability of these efforts to bring the war any closer to a conclusion generated the widespread feeling that his approach to the conflict simply was not getting the job done. Something would have to

¹⁰² Pentagon Papers, IV, p. 588; Westmoreland, A Soldier Reports, p. 436.

change, and Johnson realized this.

On February 12 the President met with several key advisers to discuss the situation in Vietnam and evaluate General Westmoreland's requirements.¹⁰³ Addressing MACV's need for reinforcements to handle the situation at Khe Sanh, the President ordered the immediate deployment of approximately 10,000 troops. But this was merely a stopgap measure. Johnson knew that the time had come for a major decision, and his options appeared to be three: continue the administration's current policies in Vietnam and hope that the timing and sequencing of bombs, troops and talks would this time prove fruitful; significantly widen the war by gearing up the economy to support a war effort and ordering a general mobilization; or, as increasing numbers urged, halt the bombing, limit the troops deployments and seek a resolution to the conflict at the negotiating table.

The President was loathed to choose. He preferred to keep his options open, as the policies he had been following in Vietnam illustrated.¹⁰⁴ He naturally inclined toward maintaining the course he had set, but Westmoreland's request confronted him with an implicit argument that the war

¹⁰³ Present were McNamara, Rusk, Rostow, Maxwell Taylor, Clark Clifford, Richard Helms (Director CIA), and General Wheeler.

¹⁰⁴ For Johnson's thoughts on 'keeping one's options open,' see Vantage Point, p. 366.

should be widened, and the President was forced to define the strategic direction. Johnson attempted to defer the choice which events and organizations had foisted upon him, and used the next 45 days to mount a last-ditch effort to salvage the vestigial legitimacy of his current policies.

On February 13 the President met again with his advisers to consider the mobilization question in depth. Wheeler pressed for the move, McNamara demurred. The President, faced with unpleasant options and confronted with disagreement among his staff principals, instructed his advisers to consider the problem and present him with a recommendation.¹⁰⁵ To obtain a first hand report of the situation on the ground in Vietnam, Johnson dispatched Wheeler to Saigon on February 21.

In Vietnam, Wheeler and Westmoreland both recognized that a major decision regarding the conduct of the war was imminent.¹⁰⁶ The generals, though concerned with the

¹⁰⁵ Johnson, The Vantage Point, p. 386. In a memo designed to structure the study, Johnson clearly indicated his preference to explore every option, short of a general mobilization, that could be taken to meet Westmoreland's request. See Memorandum from the President to the Secretary of State and the Secretary of Defense, dated February 28, 1968, in "Southeast Asia [Draft Memorandum for the President], in Papers of Clark Clifford, Box 3, LBJ Library. There is some dispute that the President had given a clear directive to the Clifford Task Group. See Schandler, Unmaking of a President, 136-7, and note 121 below.

¹⁰⁶ JCS message dated 172017Z February 1968, NSC History of the March 31 Decision. Westmoreland recalled later in an interview that "...the President and his advisors were receptive to proposals concerning a new strategy. There were signals from both Washington and the United States Pacific Command (CINCPAC) in Hawaii indicating that a reappraisal of

immediate situation in Khe Sanh, were mindful too of the impact a major policy decision in Vietnam would have on other factors. They felt that U.S. forces around the globe had been drained to precariously low levels and believed the strategic reserve needed to be reconstituted in order to avert disaster from unanticipated crises. They collaborated on a request for troops which would both meet the demands of the war, back fill seriously depleted units deployed worldwide, and repopulate the operational reserve whose ranks were decimated.

They proposed a mobilization of approximately 206,000 troops to be accomplished in three phases: 108,000 by the first of May, 42,000 by September first, and 55,500 by December.¹⁰⁷ General Wheeler recalled later that he and

national policy might result in lifting the previously imposed troop ceiling." (Schandler, Unmaking of a President, p. 106.)

107 Report of the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, on Situation in Vietnam and MACV Force Requirements, dated February 27, 1968, contained in "Memos on Vietnam: February-March 1968." Papers of Clark Clifford, Box 2, LBJ Library [hereafter cited as "MACV Force Requirements".]

An indication of the subtle ways in which institutional biases worked to shape policy is illustrated by the fact that, included in the troops request were 15 tactical fighter squadrons which were required to maintain the existing ratio of air support to ground forces. The underlying rationale for this ratio was never analyzed. One Air Force Official present at the Department of Defense consideration of the request in late February 1968, reasoned that the lack of careful assessment of the actual air-to-ground force requirements was because this "...was a matter of some delicacy in Army-Air Force relations because it touched the boundary line between the assigned roles and

Westmoreland agreed that only the first of these increments would be earmarked for Vietnam and intentionally designed the entire package to correct what, from their perspective, was a dangerous imbalance in U.S. global forces.¹⁰⁸

The complex generation of this controversial troop request illustrates the extent to which domestic political factors dominated Vietnam policy making. The immediate situation in Vietnam simply did not demand the numbers represented in their request; indeed, Westmoreland was optimistic regarding his prospects for success even in the absence of reinforcements (indeed, he had to be coached to submit a request at all). But Wheeler realized that the President would never order the call-up if he believed things could be managed with current levels. The President would have to be convinced that the immediate situation in Vietnam demanded drastic action. Before returning to Washington, Wheeler dispatched a lengthy cable to McNamara and Johnson which painted a rather gloomy picture of the situation U.S. forces faced in Vietnam.

missions of the two services. If the Air Force did not provide close air support in a ratio satisfactory to the Army, that would strengthen the Army's argument for developing its own means of close support. Already, through the development of helicopter gunships of increasing power, speed, and sophistication, the Army had pressed against that boundary." (Hoopes, Limits of Intervention, pp. 161-2).

¹⁰⁸ Cited in Schandler, Unmaking of a President, pp. 110-11.

Writing that Westmoreland faced serious and sustained pressure from the enemy, Wheeler observed: "MACV will be hard pressed to meet adequately all threats. Under these circumstances, we must be prepared to accept some reverses."¹⁰⁹ But the Chairman knew only too well that the President was not prepared to accept any reverses and emphasized that Westmoreland could not be expected to hold the slim advantage he currently had. Success, he argued, ultimately lay in aggressively regaining the battlefield initiative.¹¹⁰ Substantial numbers of additional troops would be required to implement this strategy, and Wheeler knew this.

With this pessimistic view of the situation in Vietnam, the Chairman hoped to capitalize on the President's desire to avoid a major setback in the war. By requesting 206,000 additional troops, Wheeler sought both to reinforce Westmoreland and to reconstitute the strategic reserve, though this latter justification was never mentioned in his

¹⁰⁹ "MACV Force Requirements." In a summary Memorandum for the President dated February 27, 1968, subject: Military Situation and Requirements in South Vietnam, Wheeler's saturnine prose painted an exceedingly bleak picture: "It is the consensus of responsible commanders that 1968 will be the pivotal year. The war may go on beyond 1968 but it is unlikely that the situation will return to the pre-TET condition. The forces committed and the tactics involved are such that the advantage will probably swing one way or the other, during the current year." His words resonate today with an irony only history provides.

¹¹⁰ "MACV Force Requirements."

message to the President. Wheeler felt that a healthy reserve would allow the U.S. to meet global contingencies (the worst of which, arguably, was the total collapse of the ARVN, an event which would compel the U.S. to assume the war-fighting burden entirely) and give the military necessary flexibility to pursue a more aggressive strategy in the war. But General Wheeler neglected to discuss scenarios which could develop if the situation in Vietnam became less grave, and he did not tie the request to his desire for a reconstituted strategic reserve.¹¹¹

On February 27 the President and his advisers reviewed Wheeler's cable. McNamara, in his final days as Secretary of Defense, spoke out sharply against the increase. He reminded the President of the memo he had sent in November which called for a bombing cessation, an officially declared troop ceiling and a thorough review of U.S. policy in Southeast Asia.¹¹² With the current force levels in Vietnam standing at

¹¹¹ In an interview some years later, Wheeler himself acknowledged the omissions: "I emphasized how Westy's forces were badly stretched, that he had no capability to redress threats except by moving troops around. I emphasized the threat in I Corps [the northernmost tactical region of South Vietnam]. More attacks on the cities were, I said, a possibility. I argued that Westy needed flexibility and capability. I talked about going on the offensive and taking offensive operations, but I didn't necessarily spell out the strategic options. John B. Henry, "February, 1968." Foreign Policy 4 (Fall 1971): 3-34, p. 24.

¹¹² Memo, McNamara to the President, November 1, 1967, subject: A Fifteen Month Program for Military Operations in Southeast Asia; and Memorandum of the President for the File, dated December 18, 1967, filed in 'Vietnam [March 19, 1970,

510,000, the request for an additional 206,000 troops represented a 40% increase, and McNamara argued that the President could not be sure that this action would bring the U.S. any closer to a solution in Vietnam.

Clark Clifford, McNamara's replacement, later recalled how General Wheeler's message shocked the White House.¹¹³ The optimism based on the cultivated image that the U.S. had the upper hand in the war was shattered. The report from Wheeler gave the President and his advisers the impression that disaster was all but imminent if troops in the numbers Westmoreland requested were not forthcoming. The President had to make a decision.

The dilemma Johnson faced was, in part, his own making. By refusing to mobilize the country for war as the military had persistently requested almost since the ground effort began, the President had instituted a policy of piecemeal troop level increases to the current figure of over one-half million. Denying the military at this point would be to deny the efficacy of his own policy---a policy which reflected the need to balance many factors, the principal one of which was keeping the costs of the war within the tolerance of the

Memo, Rostow to the President 'Decision to Halt the Bombing' with copies of Documents] 1967, 1968 [I] in National Security File, Country File Vietnam Box 127, LBJ Library.

¹¹³ Henry, "February, 1968," p. 23.

political will of the people and out of competition with other items on the President's agenda---particularly his domestic agenda.

The "Great Society," Johnson's chief domestic program, served to constrain in important economic and philosophic ways the level of commitment the President was willing to give to the war. Attempting to avoid strains on the economy and misdirected fiscal priorities, Johnson never called for the mobilization and build-up necessary to launch a war in earnest.¹¹⁴ His failure to do so aided, in part, the reliance on bombing as the principal means of war fighting in the early years. Bombing was the most economical way to wage war, and economy was one of the chief recommendations of the aerial campaign.¹¹⁵

Persuaded by Wheeler's cable that the situation confronting U.S. troops was critical, the President could not afford to postpone fulfilling the request and have to face possible future charges that the defeat of U.S. forces resulted from his hesitancy at this moment.¹¹⁶ On February 28, the

¹¹⁴ For Johnson's thoughts on the relationship between his chief domestic program and foremost foreign policy concern see, The Vantage Point, pp. 314-21, 406-7.

¹¹⁵ Aside from the cost-effectiveness of the bombing, the President was firmly convinced that the North Vietnamese had demonstrated that they could not be trusted to negotiate an end to the conflict; they had to be forced to do so.

¹¹⁶ The following excerpt from the Pentagon Papers captures the dilemma: "A fork in the road had been reached.

President named Clark Clifford, the new Secretary of Defense, to head an ad hoc task force to examine the military's request for additional troops, beginning what one official account called the "A to Z Reassessment" of U.S. policy in South Vietnam.¹¹⁷

The Task Force consisted of advisers from the Defense and State Departments, the White House, and the CIA.¹¹⁸ At the

Now the alternatives stood out in stark reality. To accept and meet General Wheeler's request for troops would mean a total U.S. military commitment to SVN [South Vietnam]---an Americanization of the war, a callup of reserve forces, vastly increased expenditures. To deny the request for troops, or to attempt to again cut it to a size which could be sustained by the thinly stretched active forces, would just as surely signify that an upper limit to the U.S. military commitment in SVN had been reached." (Pentagon Papers, IV, p. 549).

¹¹⁷ Pentagon Papers, IV, p. 549. Clifford recalled his mandate as somewhat more restricted than Johnson. He wrote later: "We were not instructed to assess the need for substantial increases in men and materiel; we were to devise the means by which they could be provided. Clark Clifford, "A Viet Nam Reappraisal." Foreign Affairs 47 (July 1969): 601-22, p. 609. The President recalled seeking a wide ranging analysis of alternatives, Vantage Point, p. 394. A memo from Clifford to the members of the Task Force entitled "Outline for Subjects and Division of Labor on Viet Nam Staff Study," calls for alternative courses of action available to the U.S. and North Vietnamese, implications of Westmoreland's troop request and negotiation alternatives to be explored, and seems to support Johnson. (NSC History of the March 31 Decision). See also, Pentagon Papers, pp. 549-550.

¹¹⁸ Members of the Task force were Clifford, Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Nitze, Undersecretary of Defense for International Security Affairs, Paul Warnke and Goulding for DoD, Rusk, Katzenbach, William Bundy, Phillip Habib from the State Department, General Wheeler from the JCS, Richard Helms of the CIA, Walt Rostow representing the White House, Fowler of the Treasury Department and Maxwell Taylor as special adviser. Secretary of State Dean Rusk and outgoing

initial meeting of the group, the momentum of the current policy dominated everyone's evaluation of the state of affairs. Senior advisers---Rusk, Rostow, Taylor, Wheeler, and Fowler---favored meeting the request and getting on with the war, while analysts on the second tier---Habib, Katzenbach, Nitze, and Warnke---opposed the move and argued for a policy change.¹¹⁹

Wheeler advanced the hard line, supported by Rostow and Taylor. Westmoreland's situation demanded immediate and heavy reinforcement, he argued, and this would also be a move that would set the stage for military victory. The Tet offensive had been Hanoi's best shot and it failed; the enemy was completely exposed and irreparably weakened as a result.¹²⁰ Nitze, Warnke and Katzenbach countered. There was no convincing evidence that the enemy was irreparably weakened, indeed the JCS own report was evidence to suggest that his

Secretary of Defense McNamara attended only one meeting of the group on March first.

¹¹⁹ For a discussion of the Task Force see: Henry, "February, 1968," pp. 25-29; Johnson, The Vantage Point, pp. 392-4, 397-9; Pentagon Papers, IV, pp. 252-262, 549-584; Hoopes, Limits of Intervention, pp. 171-181. For a detailed discussion of the Task Force, its deliberations and recommendations, see, "Vietnam Alternatives-Backup Material;" "Draft Memorandum for the President-Alternative Strategies in Vietnam, 1 March 1968;" and "The White House (Vietnamese War)" folders contained in the Papers of Clark Clifford, Box 2, LBJ Library; and Schandler, Unmaking of A President, pp. 121-176.

¹²⁰ Schandler, Unmaking of a President, pp. 157-61.

residual strength was a force to be reckoned with.¹²¹ The Task Force ended its deliberations by recommending little change in the current strategy, and the final report reflected the conclusions of a divided group. It specifically called for a) an immediate deployment of 20,000 troops; b) Presidential approval of reserve mobilization, coupled with larger draft calls and lengthened combat duty tours; c) reiteration of the San Antonio formula, but no new diplomatic initiatives on negotiations; and d) intensified bombing.¹²²

Clifford forwarded the draft memorandum to Johnson on March 7 and met with the President the following day to discuss the findings. The Secretary of Defense, a long time personal friend of the President, expressed his doubts about the efficacy of the current policy. This was a dangerous move, as he knew these sentiments represented a marked change of his own opinion and were views which Rusk, Rostow, Taylor, and Wheeler did not share. Clifford was no bureaucratic amateur, however. Having moved in and out of the heady circles of Presidential confidence for well over twenty years, he came to the administration with an established

¹²¹ Ibid., pp. 143-57.

¹²² Draft Memorandum to the the President, dated March 4, 1968, pp. 1-3, filed in "Draft Memorandum for the President-Alternative Strategies in Vietnam, 1 March 1968," in the Papers of Clark Clifford, Box 2, LBJ Library. See also, Pentagon Papers, IV, pp. 567-8; and Johnson, Vantage Point, p. 397.

reputation as a hawk who largely supported the President's Vietnam policies.¹²³ The very qualities which made him the confidant of Presidents, however, would not allow him to deny that the policies in Vietnam were failing, and his friendship for Johnson would not permit him to tell the President otherwise. Johnson did not suffer Clifford's change of heart well. He had expected his friend, particularly in the wake of McNamara's disaffection with the President's war policies, to be a steadfast supporter and Clifford's apparent defection exercised Johnson's ire. Their long standing friendship began to disintegrate.

Clifford's change of heart was only the most recent and visible sign of growing opposition within the administration, but Johnson reacted with the determination to carry on with his policies. He remained convinced that the "war was going better than most people realized."¹²⁴ Massive aerial firepower was authorized to break the siege of Khe Sanh; 13,500 troops were approved for deployment to Vietnam, in addition to the more than ten thousand just recently sent; and several unpublicized peace initiatives through Swedish, Romanian, Italian and Norwegian intermediaries were

¹²³ Clifford later recalled: "I supported President Johnson on Vietnam. I believed in our policy. I accepted the original domino theory...and felt we had to oppose it...Our policy seemed to be bringing us out where we wanted to come out." Quoted in Schandler, Unmaking of a President, p. 129.

¹²⁴ Johnson, Vantage Point, p. 407, 415.

pursued.¹²⁵

Events in March would demonstrate to the President just how extensive dissatisfaction with his policies had become.¹²⁶ The headlines of The New York Times on the morning of March 10 publicized the policy review within the White House, and the leaks revealed to Johnson the extremes to which some members of his administration would go to pressure him to change.¹²⁷ Gallup polls showed that 57% of the American public disapproved of the way the President was handling the war, and the importance of this dissatisfaction was not lost on Congress in this, an election year.¹²⁸

In the House of Representatives, consternation over the war and its repercussive aggravation of the chronic balance of payments problem (which further strained the international

¹²⁵ Westmoreland, A Soldier Reports, pp. 412-3; Johnson, Vantage Point, pp. 401, 415, 590-1. The 13,500 troops were originally planned to augment an earlier authorization of 30,000, however the larger deployment was never made. Pentagon Papers, IV, pp. 594-5; Schandler, Unmaking of a President, pp. 231-2.

¹²⁶ Pentagon Papers, IV, p. 585.

¹²⁷ Hedrick Smith and Neil Sheehan, "Westmoreland Requests 206,000 More Men, Stirring Debate in Administration," New York Times, March 10, 1968, pp. 1,3. For Johnson's reaction see The Vantage Point, pp. 402-3. See also Schandler, Unmaking of a President, pp. 109-207.

¹²⁸ Gallup Opinion Index 34 (April 1968), p. 3. See also, "Needed: The Courage to Face the Truth," and "And From the White House-Silence," in Newsweek, March 18, 1968, pp. 39-40, 45, respectively.

monetary system and seriously threatened the dollar), combined with opposition to large-scale reserve call-ups and general uneasiness with the apparent malaise in the Administration's Vietnam policy to prompt nearly one third of the members---including a sizeable number of Democrats---to call for an immediate Congressional review of U.S. policy in Southeast Asia.¹²⁹

The Senate Foreign Relations Committee, chaired by Senator William Fulbright, an outspoken critic of the administration's handling of the war, began its annual hearings on the Foreign Aid Bill on March 12. The hearings quickly focused on the administration's policies in the war, as some Senators increasingly feared that the President would further expand the war without consulting the Legislature.¹³⁰ Other political ramifications of the President's Vietnam policies were made graphic with the stunning 42% showing of Eugene McCarthy in the New Hampshire Democratic primary that same day, and Robert Kennedy's March 16 announcement that he was entering the Democratic Presidential race.¹³¹

Throughout this period, the President's public remarks betrayed no lack of resolve to carry through with existing

¹²⁹ Pentagon Papers, IV, p. 591.

¹³⁰ Ibid., p. 588; see also, "Demand for a Voice," Time magazine, March 15, 1968, pp. 14-15.

¹³¹ See the cover article "The Fight to Dump LBJ," in Newsweek, March 25, 1968, pp. 21-32.

policies. Speaking before a convention in Dallas, the President sounded the clarion call of commitment: "We are living in a dangerous world and...[w]e must be prepared to stand up when we need to. There must be no failing of our fighting sons...There must be no weakening of the will that would encourage the enemy or would prolong the bloody conflict."¹³² In Beaumont Texas, the President lashed out against those who called for the U.S. to withdraw from Vietnam: "...we are going to support those men out there. We are going to try to find peace with honor. We are not going to be quislings, and we are not going to be appeasers, and we are not going to cut and run."¹³³

The President's private remarks were as strident. Reacting to a memo from Arthur Goldberg, in which the U.N. Ambassador urged the President to halt the bombing and to vigorously pursue diplomatic means to end the war, the President exploded: "Let's get one thing clear. I am not going to stop the bombing...I have heard every argument on the subject, and I am not interested in further discussion. I have made up my mind. I'm not going to stop it."¹³⁴

Despite the verbal bellicosity, Johnson was deeply troubled

¹³² "Remarks at the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association Convention in Dallas," February 27, 1968. Public Papers: LBJ, 1968-69, book I, pp. 286-7.

¹³³ Public Papers: LBJ, 1968-69, book I, p. 318.

¹³⁴ Issacson and Thomas, The Wise Men, pp. 695.

with the turn of events. Seeking reassurance as he had the previous November, in late February the President had prevailed upon Dean Acheson, distinguished former Secretary of State and toughest and first of the Cold Warriors, for his opinion on the current situation in Vietnam. Before responding, Acheson requested and received extensive briefings from the competents at the second and third levels of the State, Defense, and Intelligence bureaucracies.¹³⁵ On March 14, Acheson met with Johnson to discuss his findings. He told LBJ that Westmoreland was leading him down the 'garden path.' Military victory was as elusive as ever and indeed, would take unmeasured resources and the whole of an additional five years to be achieved---if at all. Acheson went on to tell the President that his speeches were believed by no-one, either at home or abroad, and he concluded with the plain observation that the country was no longer supporting the war.

Johnson did not quite know how to react. The lunch with Acheson occurred in the wake of McCarthy's New Hampshire triumph, and amidst the Fulbright Committee hearings, receipt of Goldberg's memo, and Robert Kennedy's bid for the Presidency. Johnson felt the confining pressures of

¹³⁵ Acheson, who summoned several of his colleagues for the exercise, was briefed by Phillip Habib of the State Department, George Carver of the CIA and Major General William DePuy of the JCS. (Issacson and Thomas, The Wise Men, pp. 686-7).

Washington politics.

Taking his case directly to the people, the President spoke on March 16 at the National Farmers Union convention in Minneapolis. Johnson revealed how his policies were caught between those who demanded an immediate, unconditional withdrawal, and those who demand a more aggressive prosecution of the war.¹³⁶ At a foreign policy conference for the Leaders of National Non-governmental Organizations, he made an impassioned appeal for national unity and perseverance, observing that the offensive of the North Vietnamese had been "...aimed squarely at the citizens of America...[and was] an assault designed to crack America's will...to make some men want to surrender...to make other men want to withdraw...to trouble, worry and confuse others." With perseverance, he assured them, America would emerge victorious.¹³⁷

Johnson's proclamations alarmed Clifford who recognized the policy change imperative. His diminished ability to influence the President, however, represented a serious obstacle. Clifford began to search for allies in the White House and connected with Harry McPherson, the President's speech writer.¹³⁸ Learning from McPherson that Johnson

¹³⁶ Public Papers: LBJ, 1968-69, book I, pp. 406-413.

¹³⁷ Ibid., p. 414.

¹³⁸ Harry C. McPherson, Jr., A Political Education (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1971), p. 431;

planned to deliver a national speech on the situation in Vietnam, Clifford met with the President and his other principal advisers on March 20 and 22 to consider background material for the speech.

Johnson indicated that he wished to discuss the general situation in Vietnam, including the progress the South Vietnamese had made on their own behalf. He also told his advisers that he intended to make a 'serious peace proposal.'¹³⁹ Debate within the group of advisers centered around the type of constructive gesture which the U.S. could take to induce the North to negotiate in good faith. Secretary of State Rusk had proposed a bombing pause some days ago which Clifford opposed because he believed it did not go far enough.¹⁴⁰ Many members of the group agreed that it did not seem likely that a bombing pause would lead to negotiations. Considering this, and the fact that press leaks had come to be routine in his administration, Johnson had decided to excise the peace initiative from the speech.¹⁴¹

This move was characteristic of Johnson's war policy: to take no action meant taking undecided action. Discouraged by Johnson's familiar drift, Clifford perceived the need for

Schandler, Unmaking of a President, p. 247.

139 Johnson, Vantage Point, p. 410.

140 Schandler, Unmaking of a President, pp. 250-1.

141 Johnson, Vantage Point, p. 413

drastic measures to get the President's attention. In a calculated move, Clifford suggested to Johnson that he once again meet with the Wise Men to hear their advice before any final decision on a peace initiative.¹⁴² Johnson agreed.

On March 25 the Wise Men met at the State Department for the briefings of Habib, Carver and DePuy which Acheson had heard some weeks earlier.¹⁴³ They met the next day over lunch with the President to present their views.¹⁴⁴ McGeorge Bundy acted as spokesman and reported that the general consensus of the group was that the present policy was untenable.¹⁴⁵ To

¹⁴² Schandler, Unmaking of a President, pp. 254-5; Johnson, Vantage Point, p. 409.

¹⁴³ The Pentagon Papers record the meetings of the Wise Men as occurring on 18 and 19 March. (IV, pp. 266, 591). The President's official Daily Diary and files contained in the President's Appointment File [Diary Backup] at the LBJ Library confirm March 25 and 26 as the dates. The discrepancy might stem from the fact that the Pentagon Papers offer no first hand evidence for its accounts of the meetings, relying instead on an article published in the Los Angeles Times.

¹⁴⁴ Present were Acheson, Ball, Bradley, Dean, Dillon, Fortas, Harriman, Helms, Lodge, Murphy and Taylor. They were joined at the White House by Rostow, Goldberg, William Bundy, Assistant Secretary of State for Asian Affairs, General Matthew Ridgeway, Korean War Commander and later Commander of NATO and Cyrus Vance, Deputy Secretary of Defense under McNamara and diplomatic free-lancer for LBJ. Also at this meeting were Generals Wheeler and Creighton Abrams, Westmoreland's designated successor.

¹⁴⁵ The consensus Bundy spoke for was not quite unanimous. Fortas attempted to tell the President that certain members of the group felt differently, but was overruled by Acheson. See the account in Issacson and Thomas, Wise Men, p. 702.

continue in Vietnam required a massive, and ultimately unacceptable, expenditure of resources for a war no longer supported by the American people. The President polled each man present for his personal views. Acheson characterized the military as hell-bent on a 'purely military solution to the problem,' and General Wheeler took umbrage to this observing that at this point, the military were well aware that military victory 'in the classic sense' was not possible in Vietnam.¹⁴⁶

It was clear to the President that the unanimity of the previous November had vanished and had been replaced with deep skepticism. Taylor, Fortas and Murphy still held the line that the strategy of attrition was viable, but Acheson, McGeorge Bundy, Dillon, Vance, Goldberg, Ball and Ridgeway thought otherwise. Lodge, Dean and Bradley were somewhere between these two positions, but not quite inclined to make a call for a dramatic shift in policy. The President came out of the meeting with the clear impression that change was needed, though the group had not offered specific suggestions as to what form that change would take.

Johnson could not understand how the views of these men could have shifted so dramatically from the previous November. He demanded the same briefings of Carver, DePuy

¹⁴⁶ At this, Acheson is reported to have exclaimed: "Then what in the name of God do we have five hundred thousand troops out there for? Chasing girls?" (Issacson and Thomas, Wise Men, p. 702).

and Habib that the 'Wise Men' had received.¹⁴⁷ For Johnson, the connection between what his advisers were telling him and what that implied for the general public was obvious: "They were intelligent and experienced men, I had always regarded the the majority of them as very steady and balanced. If they had been so deeply influenced by the reports of the Tet offensive, what must the average citizen be thinking?"¹⁴⁸

The President slowly realized that he could no longer persist in his current policies and that a fundamental change in direction, away from combat and toward negotiation, must be made. He had been unable to sustain the domestic legitimacy necessary for his policies to be successful. The threshold of the national will to absorb nearly any costs associated with the war hovered dangerously near collapse. Acknowledging the need for change, the task remained to define its direction.

Advisers working on the President's Vietnam policy address proposed an unconditional bombing halt above the 20th parallel with a promise of complete halt with Hanoi's reassurances that it would respect the integrity of the

¹⁴⁷ Carver and DePuy did make their presentations, but Habib was not available, having already left town. Remarkably the Pentagon Papers do not get this quite right, relying on a published report in The Los Angeles Times for its account. See volume IV, pp. 266-8, 591-3. See also Issacson and Thomas, Wise Men, pp. 702-3; and Hoopes, Limits of Intervention, p. 217.

¹⁴⁸ Lyndon Johnson, The Vantage Point, p. 418.

intra-Vietnam border and refrain from additional attacks on cities in the South.¹⁴⁹ This satisfied the President who, on the evening of March 31, went before the American people to speak of 'peace in Vietnam.' The rigors of the previous months left their mark on Johnson, who, in a stunning epilogue to the announced policy change in the war, removed himself from the race for the Presidency in the coming

149 There was no small amount of controversy among the Presidential advisers surrounding the final draft of Johnson's speech. The language of the initial draft was considerably more bellicose than the version which was finally delivered on March 31. In an interview, Clifford recalled meeting in Dean Rusk's office on March 28 to refine the speech. Finding no peace initiative or discussion of a bombing halt, he objected: "The draft was a hard-nosed, stern call for a continuation of the policy of the application of force and a call for public support for a continuation of a policy that would ultimately bring us out all right. I thought that was a completely incorrect approach." (Quoted in Schandler, Unmaking of a President, p. 273). Clifford and Harry McPherson, the President's speech writer, prepared alternative drafts which were later incorporated into the final version. Because we cannot know how the President would have reacted had he only received the 'hard line' draft, his selection of Clifford's and McPherson's far less petulant, and indeed conciliatory, alternatives, suggests that Johnson was sincerely disposed toward changing direction. Vantage Point, pp. 418-422; Pentagon Papers, IV, pp. 593-6; Schandler, Unmaking of a President, pp. 270-78. Several contemporaneous accounts of the March 31 decisions point to the key role of Presidential advisers. See for example, Pentagon Papers, IV, p. 603; and Hoopes, Limits of Intervention, p. 224. According to Hoopes, Clifford was key.

November.¹⁵⁰ The juxtaposition of Johnson's move to de-escalate the war and his decision to forego the race was deliberate.

By this point in the war, Johnson was genuinely "...ready to take the first step to de-escalate the war" and begin the process of healing his divided nation. He was, no doubt, sincere in his commitment to these goals, but his decisions also reflected the cumulation of failed efforts to accommodate the domestic political realities he confronted, and the realization that, as a result, his policies in Vietnam had lost their legitimacy.

Summary

Lyndon Johnson's decision to abandon the pursuit of a military solution to the problem of Vietnam resulted from a complex web of politics, influence and power, and of the intimate connection between the costs a society must bear in war and the willingness of that society to bear them. The decision to de-escalate clearly illustrates the strength of domestic political factors in foreign policy decision-making.

In analytic terms, Johnson's decision to de-escalate the war clearly rejected the structural incentives and advantages

¹⁵⁰ Johnson maintains that he had been contemplating this decision for some time. See his account in The Vantage Point, pp. 425-37. See also the article by Harry Middleton, "Speech that Halted a Great Society," in the Los Angeles Times, March 31, 1988, pp. V1, V4, marking the 20th anniversary of the speech.

conveyed by the U.S. and South Vietnamese victory in the Tet Offensive. Indeed, Johnson's decision plainly rejected the tactical advantage which the U.S. and South Vietnamese forces held in the wake of the failed Communist effort. It was a response, rather, to the overwhelming domestic political pressures which the President could no longer avoid.

Over the course of the war, but particularly during the six months which preceded the de-escalation announcement of March 31, conflicting domestic expectations regarding the administration's policy in Vietnam pulled Johnson between the extremes of expanding the war and winding it down. Inclined toward neither of these margins because of his equally strong desires to support the government of South Vietnam and avoid economic ruin in the process, the President chose to fight the war with the 'minimum necessary' to accomplish the former objective, and the 'maximum feasible' given the constraints of the latter. Johnson avoided ordering a general mobilization for war and never approved the full complement of any troop request because he believed those actions would draw precious dollars and energies away from important national programs which he thought vital to the development of his nation. And because the President never ordered the mobilization of reserves which the military persistently requested, the war effort relied heavily on intensive aerial bombardment to force the enemy to capitulate.

'Rolling Thunder' quickly became the object of heavy, if contradictory, criticism from many quarters in American

society. Military leaders and sympathetic hawks in Congress complained that the administration's niggardly handling of the air war was detrimental to a coherent combat strategy. Bombing pauses designed to 'test the waters' for negotiation were condemned because they were seen to result in increased U.S. casualties in the ground war. Doves condemned the program as ineffective, indeed inhumane.

The combination of limited troop reinforcements and sustained bombardment, coupled with frequent, though unfruitful attempts to negotiate a solution to the war, continued as the administration's war policy for over three years. Critics from all sides with something to be unhappy about exerted unrelenting pressure on the President to change these undesirable policies but in conflicting directions. Conservatives urged more, liberals called for less. In the end, the erosion of support from the hawks did more to undermine the legitimacy of Johnson's policies than did any buildup in the ranks of the doves.¹⁵¹

Beginning in the latter half of 1967, Vietnam overshadowed every other national and international issue on the President's agenda, with few and fleeting exceptions. Serious questions over the purposes for which the U.S. was fighting in Vietnam and the ability of U.S. forces to achieve

¹⁵¹ This point, among others, was made convincingly by Walt Rostow in an interview with the author on May 4, 1989.

whose help he needed to secure passage of his domestic agenda. The reality of the loss of public support also came home to Johnson vividly in the results of the New Hampshire primary where Eugene McCarthy had narrowly missed upsetting the President, and in Robert Kennedy's March declaration of his own candidacy for President.

The decisions of March 31 were not structurally induced; they were not born on the battlefield. They reflected, rather, Johnson's realization that his policies for fighting the war had lost their domestic legitimacy. His decision to cease bombing north of the 20th parallel and de-escalate the U.S. effort in the ground war amount to tacit admission that his policies had failed---they failed to convey any battlefield advantage to the U.S. and South Vietnamese forces, and they failed to sustain domestic support. The President was now confronted with domestic opposition to his policies which possessed significant political leverage---enough leverage that the President opted to avoid a potentially embarrassing political confrontation with members of his own party and declared he would not seek re-election.

During the remainder of his term Johnson remained committed to the course of de-escalation, and attempted to legitimize his choice that the war be brought to an end, not through decisive battlefield successes, but through negotiations. Over the next seven months no major troop deployments were authorized, bombing limitations remained fixed (on November

1, he ordered a complete and total halt to the aerial campaign), and formal peace talks between the U.S. and Hanoi began in Paris. But the war did not end during these remaining days of Johnson's presidency---indeed it would not end in his lifetime.

Chapter 4

The Decision to Negotiate, Vietnamize, and Withdraw

We have ruled out attempting to impose a purely military solution on the battlefield. We have also ruled out...a one-sided withdrawal from Vietnam...the settlement we seek to negotiate in Paris...[is] very simple: mutual withdrawal of non-South Vietnamese forces from South Vietnam and free choice for the people of South Vietnam. I believe that the long-term interests of the peace require that we insist on no less, and that the realities of the situation require that we seek no more.¹

Lyndon Johnson's speech of March 1968 set the direction of the U.S. war effort; in May 1969, a few months after becoming President himself, Richard Nixon gave that direction form. No longer would American men, money, and materiel be sent to Vietnam in an attempt to secure an end to the war forcibly. The United States would end its involvement in Vietnam, not through victory on the battlefield, but through compromise at the negotiating table. Nixon's decision to negotiate a settlement to the war, however, did not mean that the United States would lay down its arms immediately. Much of the war remained to be fought even as the President addressed the nation on that warm evening in May. But although the

¹ "Address to the Nation on Vietnam," May 14, 1969. Public Papers of the President: Richard M. Nixon, 1969 (Washington D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1971), pp. 370, 373. Hereafter referred to as Public Papers: RMN.

President had vowed to end the war, he would do so only after achieving the objectives for which the U.S. had long fought.

Lyndon Johnson had tried---and failed---to sustain domestic legitimacy for the way in which he had conducted the war, and his decision to de-escalate the American effort reflected that failure. Richard Nixon faced the task of legitimating his strategy to end the war. Did he succeed? If time serves as a measure of success, the answer is a qualified yes. For the first three years of his administration Nixon's policies controlled the costs of the war and allowed him to pursue a negotiated settlement. With periodic announcements of troop withdrawals, enthusiastic reports of the improved ability of the South Vietnamese to fight the war themselves, and direct appeals to the American people for forbearance, Nixon avoided generating politically crippling opposition to his policies. By the end of 1971, however, the President was clearly running out of time. His supporters in Congress were finding it increasingly difficult to counter the mounting calls to limit the President's discretion concerning Vietnam, and the public's general disquiet with the President's policies took on a new significance as the 1972 election year approached. There could be no further delay; if Nixon did not end the war, the issue could be taken from his hands.

This chapter discusses the extent to which the President was able to sustain domestic legitimacy and political support for his plan to end the war. Nixon's decision to employ a

complex strategy of negotiations, Vietnamization and unilateral U.S. troop withdrawals required that he maintain a delicate balance among domestic political pressures. But precisely because of this intricate plan, the President was able to keep the costs of the war within levels that did not animate significant constraining political opposition. Clearly Nixon's steps to end the war were taken within an international context. But that context constrained, only in a general way, the choices available to the President. Domestic political pressures accounted in a very self-conscious way for the timing, sequencing, and character of the way Nixon implemented his strategy. And the following pages demonstrate that, at times, the domestic political pressures were so strong, that the policy choices which resulted from Presidential efforts to accommodate those requirements significantly deviated from the imperatives of structural-systemic factors which seemed to demand alternative behavior.

In the closing months of his administration, Lyndon Johnson had tried to establish meaningful negotiations with Hanoi. His lack of success, however, meant that the Nixon administration had to begin the process as if anew. Nevertheless, the last eight months of the Johnson presidency provide an important departure point for understanding the actions of the Nixon White House, and it is with this period that the present chapter begins.

In the wake of the March 31 announcements when Johnson had declared that U.S. bombing of North Vietnam would cease north of the twentieth parallel and that the U.S. would actively seek to resolve the war through negotiations, the administration made several attempts to get meaningful talks started in Paris. Johnson's extraordinary March 31 address was intended as a conciliatory gesture to Hanoi in the hope that North Vietnam would respond in kind, though in truth, few in the administration held any real hopes that the change in U.S. policy would yield a positive response from the North Vietnamese.² In an April 4 communique, Hanoi's reply took the following form:

...the government of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam declares its readiness to appoint its representative to contact a United States representative with a view toward arranging, with the American side, the unconditional cessation of United States bombing raids and all other acts of war against the Democratic Republic of Vietnam so that talks may start.³

The North Vietnamese response to Johnson's overture was an agreement to talk about the conditions under which peace

² Administration doubts were aired in a cable sent to a number of U.S. Ambassadors in the region. Pentagon Papers, Senator Gravel Edition, 4 volumes (Boston: Beacon Press, 1971), IV, pp. 594-6. The text of the cable is contained in Vietnam: The Definitive Documentation of Human Decisions, edited by Gareth Porter. 2 volumes (Stanfordville, New York: Earl M. Coleman Enterprises, 1979), volume 2, pp. 510-11.

³ "Text of Hanoi Offer to Discuss Bombing," Washington Post, April 4, 1968, p. A14.

talks might begin. It was an inauspicious beginning for the U.S. effort to de-emphasize a military solution to the Vietnam problem and stress diplomacy. Nevertheless the White House optimistically viewed this response as an opportunity to explore alternative ways to conclude the war, and from April to November 1968 Johnson and his advisers expended some effort to act on this and other 'opportunities' to arrive at a negotiated settlement.⁴

The first "Official Conversations" between the United States and North Vietnam began in Paris on May 13, 1968, after some trouble over administrative details concerning the site of the talks. Averell Harriman and Cyrus Vance represented the United States. At the opening session on May 13, Harriman outlined the U.S. position, calling for North Vietnam to respect the integrity of the intra-Vietnamese border, a mutual reduction of troops, and respect for the

⁴ For the efforts of the Johnson administration during this period to conclude a negotiated settlement, see Allan E. Goodman, The Lost Peace, (Stanford, California: Hoover Institution Press, 1978), pp. 65-73. For transcripts of the Official Conversations between the United States and North Vietnam which occurred during the last months of Johnson's term in office, see The Transcripts and Files of the Paris Peace Talks on Vietnam, 1968-1973, edited by Paul Kesaris (Frederick, Maryland: University Publications, 1982). Hereafter referred to as Paris Talks. Reel I in its entirety, and Reel II through "NLF Handout: The National Liberation Front is the Authentic Representative of the South Vietnamese People," November 5, 1968, contain the transcripts of the talks and pertinent documents relevant to the remainder of the Johnson period. Johnson's memoirs betray the frustration he felt at his lack of success; see, The Vantage Point (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1971), pp. 493-531

neutrality of Laos and Cambodia. From this basis, Harriman said, a lasting peace to the satisfaction of both sides might be forged. To induce Hanoi to accept these terms, the Ambassador suggested the possibility that North Vietnam could be a recipient of U.S. economic aid programmed for the region.⁵

Hanoi's representative Xuan Thuy responded tersely that North Vietnam would not consider meaningful talks until all bombing and "other acts of war against its territory" were halted.⁶ Xuan reiterated this theme at subsequent meetings, and continually stated that Hanoi's terms for ending the war required the total U.S. withdrawal from Vietnam, recognition of the National Liberation Front (NLF) in Saigon, and eventual reunification of North and South Vietnam. In fact these terms were the same as those which North Vietnamese Premier Pham Van Dong had outlined in a public speech three years earlier: the complete and immediate withdrawal of all U.S. troops, weapons, and combat support material from South Vietnam; the withdrawal of all foreign troops from Vietnam; the establishment of a coalition government including representatives of the National Liberation Front; and the reunification of North and South Vietnam without outside

⁵ Statement by U.S. Ambassador W. Averell Harriman at the opening of Official Conversations between the United States and North Vietnam, May 13, 1968. Paris Talks, reel I, 1st Session: May 13, 1968.

⁶ Paris Talks, reel I: 1st Session, May 13, 1968.

intervention.⁷ Thus Hanoi began the Paris talks with a negotiating position unchanged by years of warfare. Xuan indicated what the North Vietnamese wished the U.S. to regard as their immutable, minimum conditions for a settlement. To the United States they appeared as maximum demands to be negotiated down, and for months the talks foundered on the difference in perspectives.⁸

Throughout the summer, the administration probed for any indication from Hanoi that further restrictions on U.S. bombing would result in an easing of its battlefield pressure on the South. The Communists were not forthcoming, however, and held firm to their position that all bombing be halted and the Saigon regime of Nguyen Van Thieu be replaced before they would respond positively to U.S. initiatives. By July, the U.S. delegation in Paris felt sure that little progress could be expected in Paris so long as the bombing continued. They urged Johnson to order a complete halt, but for several reasons were unable to persuade the President to do so.

⁷ "North Viet-Nam's 'Four Points' Put Forward by Prime Minister Pham Van Dong [to the DRV National Assembly] on April 8, 1965 as Reported by Various Hanoi News Media," contained in Joint U.S. Public Affairs Office (Saigon), "The Position of North Viet-Nam on Negotiations," Viet-Nam Documents and Research Notes, no. 8 (October 1967), p. 3.

⁸ In an early effort to move beyond the public declarations which both sides felt necessary, Johnson authorized the U.S. delegation to pursue the possibility of secret talks. In June 1968 William Sullivan, U.S. Ambassador to Laos, was designated to spearhead the effort, but shortly after his appointment he fell ill, and the secret channel languished. Goodman, The Lost Peace, pp. 67-8.

First, the President was convinced that the main reason Hanoi was in Paris at all was because U.S. bombing had forced it there, and he was reluctant to restrain this powerful tool any further than he had in March.⁹ Second, Johnson believed that ordering a complete bombing halt might be seen as a political move, the effects of which only serving to alienate both liberals and conservatives. The left would deride the action as merely a political ploy by the President to improve the Democratic position in an election year. And the hawkish right, particularly powerful Conservative Democrats in Congress, would become further dismayed with the President since they were already unhappy with his March decision to restrict the bombing fearing that it unnecessarily jeopardized the lives of American soldiers. Their aggravated unhappiness with his policies might induce them to withhold their active support for the national ticket in November. Finally, the President remained reluctant to completely halt the raids because the military made a convincing argument that a bombing halt would adversely affect U.S. and South Vietnamese operations and troops.¹⁰ With the President

⁹ Johnson, The Vantage Point, p. 509.

¹⁰ Marvin Kalb and Elie Abel suggest that one key reason Johnson opposed a total halt at this time was because he suspected a conspiracy among his advisers. Kalb and Abel argue that Clark Clifford, Secretary of Defense, Hubert Humphrey, Johnson's Vice-President who held Presidential aspirations, and Nicholas Katzenbach and William Bundy of the State Department agreed with Harriman and Vance that only a complete halt to the bombing would move the talks off dead

unwilling to order a halt to the bombing, and the North Vietnamese delegation in Paris pressing its demand that no progress could be made in the talks unless a halt were ordered, the negotiations stalled.

Though progress toward settlement had faltered, during July 1968 the presidential campaign season was in full swing. The Republican National Convention nominated Richard Nixon and adopted a policy plank on Vietnam which called for an "honorably negotiated peace and progressive de-Americanization of the war."¹¹ Three weeks later the Democrats held their convention in Chicago. While demonstrators rioted with policemen in the streets outside the convention hall, the proceedings inside rapidly deteriorated into confusion and discord. The Democrats were deeply divided over candidates and issues. Though Vice-President Hubert Humphrey emerged as the nominee, the official Democratic platform which endorsed Johnson's policies of de-escalation and negotiations was contested by

center. Roots of Involvement (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1971), p. 260. A New York Times editorial on July 29 urging the President to do the same triggered the suspicion of conspiracy in the President's mind.

¹¹ The text of Draft Republican Platform appears in the New York Times, August 5, 1968, p. 26. See also, John W. Finney, "Platform Draft Backs 'Fair and Equitable' Vietnam Accord," New York Times, August 5, 1968, pp. 1, 24; and Tom Wicker, "Platform is Approved By the Convention-Nomination Today," New York Times, August 7, 1968, pp. 1, 28.

rival groups within the Democratic party. Consisting largely of followers of Eugene McCarthy and Kennedy, these groups issued alternative planks on the war, calling, variously, for an unconditional halt to the bombing, a reduction of U.S. offensive operations in Indochina, the withdrawal of all U.S. and North Vietnamese military forces from South Vietnam, and strongly suggested that Saigon open talks with the NLF and accept a coalition government.¹²

As summer gave way to fall, activity on the Presidential campaign trail heated up while the Paris negotiating team sat in icy deadlock with the North Vietnamese. Once again bombing stood as the central issue. Johnson now, however, appeared disposed to ordering a halt, though only if three conditions were met: first, 'prompt and serious' talks had to begin within twenty-four hours of the halt. Second, Hanoi must not take advantage of the halt to attack South Vietnam; and third, the North Vietnamese must stop the shelling of South Vietnamese towns and cities.¹³ A breakthrough of sorts

¹² John W. Finney, "Division in Party: Platform Group Gets Compromise from Humphrey Camp," New York Times, August 20, 1968, pp. 1, 26; "Vietnam: The Dissidents Walk the Plank," Newsweek, September 9, 1968, pp. 32-33; and, John W. Finney, "Kennedy Backers Offer War Plank But McCarthy Group Balks at Compromise-Rusk is for General Statement," New York Times, August 21, 1968, pp. 1, 33.

¹³ Goodman, The Lost Peace, p. 69. According to Johnson, by 'serious,' the U.S. meant the official inclusion of the South Vietnamese Government in the talks. Though the US and Hanoi had been meeting since May 13, representatives from the South Vietnamese Government and the National Liberation Front

came at a private negotiating session in mid-October when the North Vietnamese tacitly accepted a U.S. proposal that the bombing be halted in exchange for North Vietnam's agreement to cease its infiltration and rocket attacks across the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ).¹⁴

The U.S. was encouraged, and quickly moved to press this hint of progress to advantage. Their hope that productive talks would quickly ensue vanished, however, when South Vietnamese President Nguyen Van Thieu refused to cooperate. Suspecting that the United States was about to take steps which would seriously jeopardize his nation, Thieu informed American Ambassador Ellsworth Bunker that he had three conditions of his own which had to be met before he would agree to a bombing halt: North Vietnam must commit to de-escalating the war; Hanoi must agree to negotiate directly with Saigon; and the Communists must guarantee that the NLF would not participate in the talks as a separate delegation.¹⁵

had been excluded from the substantive discussions. They participated only as non-participatory observers. The Vantage Point, pp. 513-5.

¹⁴ This 'breakthrough' might have been more illusory than real, though clearly at the time the administration believed it had achieved an understanding with Hanoi from which it could order a halt the bombing. See Stuart H. Loory, "Secret Bomb Halt Sessions Revealed," Los Angeles Times, March 9, 1969, pp. 1, B2. See also "A Time of Testing in Vietnam," Time, May 7, 1969, pp. 29-30.

¹⁵ See Nguyen Tien Hung and Jerrold L. Schecter, The Palace File (New York: Harper and Row, 1986), p. 22, and

Thieu's demands, plus his claim that he could not possibly get a delegation to Paris within the time period that the standing proposal called for, enraged the White House. After months of no progress, Johnson was not about to let this opportunity to get the talks off dead center fail because of last minute objections of the South Vietnamese.¹⁶ On October 31 Johnson announced that a total ban on U.S. air attacks against North Vietnam would be implemented the following day, November 1. The President also acknowledged a 'role' for the NLF at the negotiations.¹⁷ Shortly after Johnson's announcement, Thieu declared that the United States had acted unilaterally, and that he opposed both the bombing halt and the inclusion of the NLF in Paris. Several days later, in a demonstration of his opposition, Thieu announced that the South Vietnamese would boycott the Paris talks.¹⁸

"Behind the Bombing Halt: An Account of Bargaining," New York Times, November 11, 1968, pp. 1, 20.

¹⁶ "Saigon Balks, but the Bombing Stops at Last," Newsweek, November 11, 1968, pp. 46, 51-4. See also Hung and Schecter, The Palace File, pp. 24-6.

¹⁷ Johnson, The Vantage Point, pp. 528-9. For Richard Nixon's recollections of these events, particularly emphasizing the political significance of Johnson's decisions during this period, see RN: Memoirs (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1978), pp. 322-29.

¹⁸ "Waiting for the Word," Newsweek, November 4, 1968, pp. 44-45.

For all of Lyndon Johnson's anguish over the March 31 decision to restrict U.S. bombing of North Vietnam, his choice not to seek re-election and thereby de-politicize the war, and his genuine desire to achieve a negotiated settlement in Paris, his administration ultimately made little real progress toward ending the war. In the end Johnson's efforts were thwarted not by the Communists, but by the South Vietnamese who believed that the White House had abandoned their interests in its haste to conclude the war in advance of the November ballot. The South Vietnamese boycott dealt a severe blow to the Administration and to the Democrats who had hoped that the combination of a total bombing halt and full participation by all parties in the negotiations would represent a major step toward ending the war---a move that would redound to their benefit in the Presidential election now only days away.

The White House, however, had completely misjudged its ally. Thieu's refusal to participate in the negotiations spoke to his fears that a Humphrey administration would mean a continued softening of U.S. support and the installation of a coalition government in his country within months---an eventuality that, to Thieu's mind, only presaged complete Communist domination over South Vietnam. Thieu had acted deliberately, and by his lights the stalling maneuver had

achieved the intended political effect---Richard Nixon defeated Hubert Humphrey in a close election on November 6.¹⁹

Unable to impose a military settlement on the battlefield and having failed in his latest dramatic move to precipitate a negotiated settlement, Lyndon Johnson could do no more.²⁰ The new Republican administration of Richard Nixon inherited the task of defining how the war would end.

Richard Nixon and the War Termination Imperative

No stranger to Executive Branch decision-making, Nixon realized that time was an enemy to the President in the policy-making process, and nowhere was this more true than in policy-making during war. "When a President sends American troops to war, a hidden timer starts to run. He has a finite

¹⁹ Thieu objected to the general participation of the NLF in the talks, and he was particularly adamant that the NLF not be accorded full and equal status with the South Vietnamese government. In an interview years later, Thieu believed that his actions at this point decisively aided Richard Nixon in his quest for election. When asked if he felt Nixon owed a debt to him for his support during the 1968 campaign, Thieu replied: "Naturally, naturally." See the discussion and notes in Hung and Schecter, The Palace File, p. 21.

²⁰ Senior aides to Johnson reported that the President's last-ditch efforts to score a victory in the Paris talks derived principally from his desire to be remembered as a great President. They are quoted as saying, that by this point in his administration "...Lyndon Johnson had become primarily concerned with securing for himself what he regards as a just place in History. "A War on the Way Out," Newsweek, October 28, 1968: 32-33, p. 32.

period of time to win the war before the people grow weary of it."²¹

Believing that Johnson's political fate fell upon him partly because 'time had run out,' Nixon determined that he would not suffer the same fate. He committed himself to ending U.S. involvement in Indochina during his first administration, and he would do so in such a way that would not jeopardize his chances for a second.²²

²¹ Richard Nixon, No More Vietnams (New York: Avon, 1985), p. 88. Written over fifteen years after Nixon first took office as President, this volume consolidates the former President's recollections of policy-making on Vietnam. In writing this book, Nixon relied on much of the same official reports and personal files used in preparing his memoirs.

One uses memoirs and retrospective accounts, of course, with caution as these works tend to represent events and decisions as more coherent and logically determined than was the actual case. Nevertheless, for the purposes of this dissertation, the memoirs of key figures serve an important, if limited, purpose. It is a central claim of the present work that leaders' susceptibility to domestic political factors strongly influence, in certain cases, the foreign policy choices they make. In the instances cited in this work, the personal memoirs and retrospectives of the central decision-makers relate, often with some emotion, the significance and impact of domestic political pressures on their foreign policy decision-making. This is especially striking since there are clear opportunities and strong incentives to represent one's actions, post hoc, as principally driven by the needs of the international situation and not sullied by political motivations. The fact that this memoir literature recalls in such rich detail, and with vivid emotion, the impact which domestic political factors had on foreign policy decision-making, in spite of the incentives to portray it otherwise, lends a good deal of support to the central argument of this work.

²² During the campaign, Nixon had spoken repeatedly about his commitment to end the war, though he refused to provide the details of his plan. Following the election, during the transition period at his Headquarters in the Hotel Pierre in New York, Nixon emphasized his desires to end the war as soon

Nixon came to office with two long term foreign policy objectives: 'normalization' of relations between the United States and the People's Republic of China, and rapprochement with the Soviet Union. Both of these objectives represented a major shift in policies that the United States had followed since the earliest days of the Cold War, and their achievement required a fundamental reassessment of the United States' global role. Neither objective could be accomplished with the U.S. embroiled in war, however, and the way in which the United States concluded its involvement in Vietnam would have profound effects on future American relations with each of these Communist superpowers. The White House considered finding an 'honorable' end to the war the most pressing foreign policy issue of the new administration particularly because of its implications for U.S. international relations around the globe.²³ Nixon also hoped that signalling a strong

as possible. Remarking to H.R. Haldeman, his White House Chief of Staff designate, the President-elect observed: "I'm not going to end up like LBJ...holed up in the White House, afraid to show my face on the street. I'm going to stop that war. Fast. I mean it!" (Quoted in H. R. Haldeman, The Ends of Power, New York: Dell Publishing Company, 1978, p. 120.)

23 In an interview with journalist Cy Sulzberger some months after taking office, Nixon reiterated his concern regarding the effects that the war was having on the global position of the United States. C.L. Sulzberger, Seven Continents and Forty Years (New York: Quadrangle, 1977), p. 505-6. In an article published in the January 1969 issue of Foreign Affairs Kissinger wrote: "...ending the war honorably is essential for the peace of the world. Any other solution may unloose forces that would complicate the prospects of

desire to end the war and holding out the prospect of improved relations with the PRC and the Soviet Union, he might induce the Communist giants to encourage Hanoi to be more reasonable in the negotiations.

Recognizing that Executive hold on Vietnam policy making had become precarious, Nixon knew that the American people were tiring of the war and congressional opposition which mirrored that weariness had already begun to build. This meant that the President had only a limited period of time to achieve any measure of a satisfactory settlement in Vietnam before the political support he needed to do so (particularly in Congress) evaporated completely. Nixon therefore began his evaluation of the situation in Vietnam before he took the oath of office.²⁴ This preliminary exercise provided the basis for the first major foreign policy review of the new administration. The intense examination of Vietnam policy

international order." "The Viet Nam Negotiations," Foreign Affairs 47 (January 1969): 211-234, p. 234.

24 Under Presidential instructions National Security Adviser Henry Kissinger conducted a general review the foreign policy apparatus of the Executive and a specific reassessment of all possible policy options regarding Vietnam in November and December 1968. See Roger Morris, Uncertain Greatness: Henry Kissinger and American Foreign Policy (New York: Harper and Row, 1977), pp. 77-80; 90-93. See also Henry A. Kissinger, White House Years, pp. 237-9. For a critical view which argues that upon taking office Nixon had a only vague strategy for ending the war, see Tad Szulc, The Illusion of Peace (New York: Viking Press, 1978), especially pp. 22-27.

was overseen and coordinated by National Security Adviser Kissinger and his staff, and consolidated the opinions and considered assessments of the entire foreign policy bureaucracy on the best course of action that the new administration should take in the war.

This first National Security Study Memorandum (known as NSSM-1), consisted of twenty-eight questions on topics ranging from the status of negotiations in Paris, to estimates of force ratios, and prognoses for the eventual outcome of the war. The final report included an executive summary as well as the detailed reports of the State Department, the American Embassy in Saigon, the Central Intelligence Agency, the Department of Defense, the Military Assistance Command in Vietnam and the Commander-in-Chief Pacific.

In the report, the respondents agreed generally on five points:

(1) The GVN [Government of South Vietnam] and allied position in Vietnam has been strengthened recently in many respects.

(2) The GVN has improved its political position, but it is not certain that the GVN and other non-communist groups will be able to survive a peaceful competition with the NLF for political power in South Vietnam.

(3) The RVNAF [the armed forces of South Vietnam] alone cannot now, or in the foreseeable future, stand up to the [sic] current North Vietnamese-Viet Cong forces.

(4) The enemy have suffered some reverses but they have not changed their essential objectives and they have sufficient strength to pursue these objectives. We are not attriting his forces faster than he can recruit or infiltrate.

(5) The enemy is not in Paris primarily out of weakness.

Nevertheless, there were fundamental and important differences between the opinions of the respondents. The report revealed that

disagreements...are reflected in two schools in the government with generally consistent membership. The first school...usually includes MACV [Military Assistance Command, Vietnam], CINCPAC, JCS and Embassy Saigon, and takes a hopeful view of the current and future prospects in Vietnam...The second school...usually includes OSD [Office of the Secretary of Defense], CIA and (to a lesser extent) State, and is decidedly more skeptical about the present and pessimistic about the future.²⁵

But the bureaucratic agencies were not alone in their disagreement over the best course to pursue in ending the war. Throughout the government and the country, policy preferences for Vietnam ranged from major escalation of the ground and air wars on the one hand, to unilateral and immediate withdrawal on the other. There were arguments for

²⁵ The study was released into the Congressional Record, without reference, on May 10, 1972 by Democratic Representative Ronald Dellums of California. (Congressional Record, vol. 118, part 13, 92d Congress, 2d session. May 4-11, 1972, pp. 16748-16836.) The summary appears on pp. 16750-16754. See also Murrey Marder, "'69 Report to Nixon was Split on War," Washington Post, April 25, 1972, pp. 1, A13; Spencer Rich, "A Kissinger Study," Washington Post, April 25, 1972, pp. 1, A19; and Stanley Karnow, "Pacification: Early Doubts," Washington Post, April 26, 1972, pp. 1, A12.

each of these extremes as well as for certain options which fell between them.

Committed hawks argued that military victory, in the conventional sense, should be pursued at every and all costs. They tied this argument to the historical basis of U.S. involvement in Indochina which stemmed from America's apprehension over the spread of Communism.²⁶ Those same hardliners who advocated military escalation, however, demanded that a change in strategy accompany the buildup. They urged the invasion of North Vietnam, extensive bombing of the complex irrigation dike system and the aggressive mining of Haiphong Harbor in order that the increased numbers of American soldiers that they were recommending be sent to finish the job, might do so in short order.

Several factors militated against renewing the U.S. combat commitment to the war. Johnson's de-escalation announcement of the previous March had all but foreclosed significant expansion of military force on the part of the United States, and domestic polls increasingly registered strong sentiment in favor of a lessened U.S. role in the region.²⁷ Moreover, Nixon was not prepared to authorize an aggressive expansion

²⁶ Republican Senator John Tower of Texas often took a vocal lead in advancing this position. See "Five Ways Out of Vietnam," Newsweek, October 20, 1969, p. 30.

²⁷ By January 1969, 57% of those polled believed the time had come to gradually reduce the numbers of American soldiers in Vietnam. Gallup Opinion Index 44 (February, 1969), p. 3.

of the ground or air efforts, fearing that if he did, domestic and international fallout from such an action would do irreparable damage, not only to his presidency, but also to his entire foreign policy agenda.²⁸ Finally, even if escalation were authorized, no one could fix with any degree of certainty, the time it would take to secure military victory, even with an increase in troops and the expansion of combat.

The President's reluctance to widen the war stemmed from the belief that he would not be able to sustain the domestic support necessary to see the war through to successful conclusion. Nixon anticipated that domestic pressure to end U.S. involvement completely, in light of the increased American casualties which would inevitably result from widening the war, would be almost impossible for him to contain long enough for the military to achieve success on

28 There is some evidence to suggest that Nixon had clearly decided against military escalation even before he had taken the oath of office. In an unpublished campaign memo, Nixon wrote that the policy of his new administration would involve a "shift away from one dimensional military approach...to a multi-dimensional use of diplomatic, economic power of the U.S." Campaign Memo dated July 7, 1968. Nixon Papers. Hoover Institution Archives. See also RN: Memoirs, see particularly pp. 347-9. By way of conclusion he writes in his memoirs: "Since I had ruled out a quick military victory, the only possible course was to try for a fair negotiated settlement that would preserve the independence of South Vietnam." [Emphasis added].

the battlefield. And nuclear weapons were not an option which the President would consider.²⁹

The policy choices which emphasized a military solution to the war did not appear to offer the President new ways in which to bring the war to a rapid and successful conclusion. Defying those who insisted that increased troop levels be accompanied by more aggressive battlefield tactics, the President remained unwilling to widen the war in light of his plans for other aspects of American foreign policy. Moreover, even if the United States opted to fight more aggressively, few informed observers held little expectation that the South Vietnamese would be able to withstand the pressure from North Vietnam that would surely come once the U.S. had departed. Renewed escalation did not offer a solution to the problem of ending the war as much as it held the potential to complicate the situation hopelessly.

At the opposite end of the policy spectrum lay the choice of complete, unilateral, and immediate withdrawal of all U.S. forces from South Vietnam. Pressure for this option came both from those who rejected the basis for U.S. involvement in Indochina as well as those who believed that the U.S. was wasting precious men and material in a war that was

²⁹ See Goodman, The Lost Peace, p. 85. Nixon, RN: Memoirs, p. 347

unwinnable.³⁰ At this stage in the planning, the President dismissed unilateral withdrawal because he believed it would mean the collapse of South Vietnam; the moment the U.S. departed, Hanoi would take advantage of its superior military organization and support structure to overcome Saigon.³¹ The Thieu government simply was not yet politically strong enough, nor was the South Vietnamese Military [Army of the Republic of Vietnam-ARVN] yet adequately trained or equipped to guarantee the security of their own nation. Further, a precipitate U.S. withdrawal at this point, aside from generating charges from Conservatives that the Administration was 'soft' on Communism, would have repercussions for American stature in the international arena. Friendly

³⁰ Among those pressing for this option were Senator Charles Goodell who desired a total withdrawal of U.S. troops by the end of 1970, and former Secretary of Defense Clark Clifford who urged that U.S. combat troops be withdrawn by January 1971 with only support troops left behind to assist the South Vietnamese. "Five Ways Out of Vietnam," Newsweek, October 20, 1969, p. 29.

³¹ In an article written before he was elected President, Nixon had argued that the U.S. military presence in Asia was vital to the stability of the region and helped to maintain limits on what was perceived to be an expansionist Red China. "Asia After Viet Nam," Foreign Affairs 46 (October 1967): 111-125. Later, as President, Nixon emphasized his rejection of the possibility of an immediate and unilateral U.S. troop withdrawal, fearing that a U.S. departure would lead, within months, to North Vietnamese control over South Vietnam and the eventual communist domination of Southeast Asia. In a May 1969 interview with C.L. Sulzberger he remarked that "thousands of people...would be slaughtered if we just pulled out...it is obvious that if we pulled out other countries would crumble." C.L. Sulzberger, Seven Continents and Forty Years, p. 505.

nations would have cause to question the reliability of the U.S. as an ally, and other Communist countries might feel free to exercise hegemonic designs without fear of American intervention.³²

Neither renewed military escalation nor unilateral withdrawal represented appealing alternatives to end the war. Nuclear war was unthinkable, conventional escalation was politically impossible, and unilateral withdrawal was unconscionable. Nixon had to choose his war termination objectives and strategy carefully, lest the whole of the U.S. effort in Vietnam over the previous two decades be recast as purposeless.

One alternative which lay between the extremes was the choice of relying exclusively on negotiations to secure a settlement to the war. Proponents of this option argued that military victory, 'in the conventional sense' had long been recognized as not possible for the United States, and that additional---and ultimately needless---bloodshed could be avoided by declaring a cease-fire while negotiations to resolve the dispute could be conducted.³³ Proponents of this view based their argument on the belief that the North

³² Goodman, The Lost Peace, p. 85.

³³ W. Averell Harriman and Cyrus Vance, former principal U.S. negotiators in Paris, strongly supported this option. "Five Ways Out of Vietnam," Newsweek, October 20, 1969, pp. 30-1. See also "Harriman Bids U.S. Reduce War Levels," New York Times, June 22, 1969, p. 3.

Vietnamese were as interested in avoiding needless bloodshed as the United States was, and that if presented with reasonable proposals, would move quickly toward a resolution. The key to settlement, they counselled, lay not in aggressive combat in Vietnam but rather in aggressive diplomacy in Paris.

The President rejected exclusive emphasis on negotiations because he did not share the view that the North Vietnamese were 'reasonable.' He was convinced that unless the United States backed up its words at the negotiating table with deeds on the battlefield, the North would have no reason to negotiate in good faith.³⁴ A negotiated settlement held little intrinsic value for Hanoi and consequently offered little incentive for them to engage in concessions simply in order to achieve settlement. Americans were the ones who needed a resolution to the conflict, and it was the Americans who could not afford the political costs associated with protracted struggle. The Communists neither shared the American time schedule nor their need for a negotiated resolution to the war.

³⁴ In a March 16, 1969 meeting with Secretary of State William Rogers, Secretary of Defense Melvin Laird, National Security Assistant Kissinger, and General Earle Wheeler, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Nixon observed: "The state of play in Paris is completely sterile. I am convinced that the only way to move the negotiations off dead center is to do something on the military front. That is something they will understand." RN: Memoirs, p. 381.

For the United States, the greatest threat to a negotiated settlement was the time it would take to accomplish, and a lack of progress in the peace talks would engender an adverse domestic political reaction to the President's policies which could translate into real pressure to settle almost at any cost. The Communists could rely on the rapidly eroding American will to achieve for them what fighting on the battlefield could not---the withdrawal of the United States from Indochina. Hanoi's ability to 'wait out' the war convinced Nixon and his advisers that the North Vietnamese had to be pressured into meaningful discussions.³⁵ But military measures had to be taken with care. Domestic resistance to escalation significantly constrained the President's military options, and battlefield pressure on the North Vietnamese to induce them to negotiate in good faith would either have to be clear and unambiguous responses to instances of Hanoi's military aggression, or carried out in secret. The President's plan to end the war, sensitive to domestic political realities, altered the military's ground strategy significantly.

³⁵ In late summer 1969, at a secret and exclusive meeting of military advisers assembled to plan a 'savage, punishing' military blow to Hanoi, Kissinger is said to have sought to devise a strong and decisive military strategy aimed at compelling North Vietnam to settle the war. He remarked: "I can't believe that a fourth-rate power like North Vietnam doesn't have a breaking point." (Quoted in Morris, Uncertain Greatness, p. 164.)

Acknowledging the domestic pressures which had dictated the change in U.S. ground strategy, the administration determined that, on the battlefield, the U.S. would discontinue its emphasis on conventional military operations and redouble its Pacification efforts. Through intensified training and supply, the Americans would hand over the principal share of combat to the South Vietnamese. At the same time, the United States would begin to withdraw its combat forces gradually. The military key to Nixon's entire plan to end the war lay in the success of the program by which the South Vietnamese would assume total responsibility for fighting the war. This program became known as Vietnamization.³⁶

Vietnamization reflected the President's sensitivity to domestic political considerations which demanded that U.S. costs of continued involvement in Vietnam be reduced. Steadily decreasing the combat activity of American soldiers by increasing that of the South Vietnamese would achieve this goal. Costs would be further reduced through the gradual withdrawal of U.S. combat forces from Indochina. To achieve legitimacy and gain support for his policies in order to buy enough time to ensure a stable South Vietnam, Nixon needed to demonstrate that he was indeed bringing the war to an end for

³⁶ Secretary of Defense Melvin Laird is generally credited with the term 'Vietnamization,' though the idea traces its roots to the Johnson administration. For a discussion of how Vietnamization evolved as a strategic component in the Nixon administration's plan to end the war see "The Laird Plan," Newsweek, June 2, 1969, p. 44.

the United States. The best tangible evidence of this movement toward a conclusion was fewer American troops on the ground in Vietnam.

But while the end of the war was clearly an objective of the Nixon administration, it was not the only objective. In simple terms, the U.S. wanted to see a stable and secure South Vietnam capable of self-defense against renewed episodes of Communist aggression.³⁷ Thus Nixon's public statements linked the pace of U.S. troop withdrawals to several factors: progress in the Paris negotiations, decreased battlefield activity on the part of the North Vietnamese, and progress in Vietnamization.³⁸

³⁷ In a nationally televised interview on July 27, 1969, Defense Secretary Melvin Laird observed that the President had "made it clear that our objective is the right of self-determination for the people of South Vietnam, not a military victory." Face the Nation: The Collected Transcripts from the CBS Radio and Television Broadcasts 12 (1969), p. 194.

³⁸ Public Papers: RMN, 1969, p. 443. The elasticity with which these three criteria would be applied in practice was demonstrated by the President himself within the first year of his administration. A revealing exchange at a news conference on December 8, 1969 also offers intriguing evidence that supports the present contention the President's plan for ending the war was based on driving the costs of the conflict down to levels that the American people could bear:

Q. Mr. President, will our Vietnam involvement be reduced in your administration to the point where it will command no more public attention than, say, Korea does now?

THE PRESIDENT. Well, that is certainly our goal and I think we are well on the way to achievement of that goal. We have a plan for the reduction of American forces in Vietnam, for

Nixon persisted in the Paris negotiations despite serious misgivings. In his mind, U.S. participation in the peace talks had less to do with the realities of the conflict with North Vietnam than they did with the realities of domestic conflict within the United States. With the decision against a military solution, negotiations had assumed an important role in U.S. efforts to end the war, serving to convince the American people that their government was expending every effort to pursue a settlement.³⁹ Progress in the peace talks would allow the U.S. to sustain the necessary military effort that would be required to make those negotiations meaningful.

Since the President was convinced that the North Vietnamese would not negotiate in good faith unless coerced into doing so, the U.S. would have to persist in its combat effort. Continued combat, however, ran the risk of animating hostile American public opinion. The White House needed to demonstrate progress in the Paris negotiations in order that the additional coercive pressure necessary to make that

removing all combat forces from Vietnam,
regardless of what happens in the negotiations.

(Public Papers: RMN, 1969, p. 1011, emphasis added).

³⁹ Nixon recalled in his memoirs: "I was rather less optimistic than Kissinger regarding the prospect of a breakthrough in the...negotiations, but I agreed that at the very least they would provide an indisputable record of our desire for peace and our efforts to achieve it." Nixon, RN: Memoirs, p. 413.

progress real could be continuously applied to North Vietnam. The two elements were inextricably tied to each other.

Having ruled out exclusive reliance on either military or diplomatic means to resolve the war, the White House placed the burden for settlement on both. Designed with the twofold objective of extricating the United States from the conflict while securing a militarily strong and politically viable South Vietnam capable of its own defense, the administration's strategy depended equally upon negotiations and sustained combat (though at a reduced level for the U.S.) for success. Progress in negotiations---something only guaranteed by sustained combat pressure on North Vietnam---would influence the process of Vietnamization. And the better the prospects for a negotiated settlement, the greater the confidence that South Vietnam would be secure, and the faster the U.S. would be able to withdraw its forces from Indochina.

On the international front, the U.S. would attempt to isolate Hanoi by engaging in direct contact with its guardian allies---the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China. With nearly all of North Vietnam's war making capability coming from these two Communist giants, many believed that resolution to the conflict required their involvement, or more correctly, their dis-involvement in terminating the war. Soviet and Chinese hopes for improved relations with the United States could be exploited to encourage them to induce

the North Vietnamese to cooperate in a negotiated settlement. And by focusing on superpower diplomacy as a means by which the war might be brought to a more speedy conclusion, Nixon hoped to launch his more ambitious plans for improved U.S.-Sino and U.S.-Soviet relations.

Time, however, was still of the essence. The President needed, on the one hand, to contain the costs of continued combat pressure on North Vietnam and, on the other, use progress in negotiations and Vietnamization to bolster the will of the American people to sustain those costs. As Nixon later recalled: "I knew that we would have enough time [to implement our strategy] only if the level of the fighting remained low. If the war heated up, American casualty rates, and, in turn, domestic pressure to get out of Vietnam would increase dramatically."⁴⁰

That pressure would come from both conservatives and liberals who had reason to oppose Nixon's approach to terminating the war. The President had to demonstrate to the hawks that his decision to negotiate rather than fight was a

⁴⁰ Nixon, No More Vietnams, p. 107. Though a retrospective comment, this observation acknowledges the political essence of the President's Vietnam policy-making. Nixon's choices of policy substance, as well as his selection of opportunities to implement those choices, resulted from his evaluation of the domestic political repercussions of the various options he considered. Nixon's plan of negotiations and Vietnamization, by his estimates, was not only substantively sound, but also politically viable; it would lead the United States out of its war in Vietnam, without unnecessarily jeopardizing the President's political future.

responsible choice and did not mean the abandonment of the South Vietnamese or abdication of the U.S. responsibility to contain Communism. He also needed to demonstrate to the doves that Vietnamization was a policy that would, in fact, bring the war to an end for the United States. Having made the choices he did, the task before the President now was to secure legitimacy for those choices.

Legitimizing the Strategy

In February 1969, the North Vietnamese launched a series of attacks in the South designed, perhaps, to test the mettle of the new President. The White House believed that the situation demanded forceful retaliation to convince Hanoi that the Nixon administration could not be pushed around, but an American military operation of any size risked unleashing a storm of domestic protest. After considering the need to demonstrate resolve in light of the domestic political risks such a demonstration might evoke, the President decided to authorize secret bombing attacks on North Vietnamese sanctuaries in Cambodia. American bombers made the first secret run on March 18, 1969.⁴¹ When the first wave of

⁴¹ The secrecy surrounding the Cambodian bombing illustrates an earlier point: the domestic political realities in the United States demanded that American military actions in Vietnam would either have to be in retaliation to Hanoi's demonstrated aggression, or carried out covertly. It was administration fears of adverse domestic reaction to the bombing which was most responsible for the Cambodian operation having been conducted in secret.

attacks generated no official demurrer from either Cambodian Prince Sihanouk or Hanoi, the President authorized additional attacks throughout April and May. By this time, however, the American public was becoming restive at the absence of clear progress toward finding a solution to the war which the incoming administration had promised over five months earlier.⁴²

To allay fears and dispel criticism that his administration lacked a coherent policy for ending the conflict, Nixon gave his first major address on Vietnam on May 14. The President stated that time and events had made it clear that a military settlement to the war was no longer possible and that the United States would seek a negotiated settlement with Hanoi. Nixon then outlined the terms of agreement which he considered reasonable but generous: mutual withdrawal of American and North Vietnamese troops from South Vietnam; and internationally supervised, free, elections for the South. The President's formula for peace consisted of the following eight points:

By Nixon's own account: "My administration was only two months old, and I wanted to provoke as little public outcry as possible at the outset." Nixon, RN: Memoirs, p. 382.

⁴² For an examination of Nixon's Vietnam strategy in the early months of his administration, emphasizing the lack of U.S. activity toward ending the war, see the cover article in Time, March 28, 1969, pp. 18-28.

-As soon as agreement can be reached, all non-South Vietnamese forces would begin withdrawals from South Vietnam

-Over a period of 12 months, by agreed-upon stages, the major portions of all U.S., allied, and other non-South Vietnamese forces would be withdrawn. At the end of this 12-month period, the remaining U.S., allied, and other non-South Vietnamese forces would move into designated base areas and would not engage in combat operations.

-The remaining U.S. and allied forces would complete their withdrawals as the remaining North Vietnamese forces were withdrawn and returned to North Vietnam.

-An international supervisory body, acceptable to both sides, would be created for the purpose of verifying withdrawals, and for any other purpose agreed upon between the two sides.

-This international body would begin operating in accordance with an agreed timetable and would participate in arranging supervised cease-fires in Vietnam.

-As soon as possible after the international body was functioning, elections would be held under agreed procedures and under the supervision of the international body.

-Arrangements would be made for the release of prisoners of war on both sides at the earliest possible time.

-All parties would agree to observe the Geneva Accords of 1954 regarding South Vietnam and Cambodia, and the Laos Accords of 1962.⁴³

⁴³ For the complete text of the address see, Public Papers: RMN, 1969, pp. 369-75. The New York Times of May 15, 1969 contains extensive coverage of the speech and the prominent reaction it generated. See also "Vietnam: The Nixon Plan," Newsweek, May 26, 1969, pp. 33-36. A comparison of Nixon's eight points and the ten points which the NLF presented in Paris on May 8, 1969 appears in the May 26, 1969 Newsweek, p. 35.

In another move to undermine some of the mounting domestic criticism of the war, Nixon had requested that Congress exact legislation to reform the draft, principally calling for the draft-eligible age group to be reduced from 19-26 years of age to just 19. See "Nixon's Contract for Peace," Time, May 23, 1969, pp. 20-22. The political significance of this move was seen

In the Paris sessions following the speech, North Vietnam spurned the proposal. Hanoi's rejection of what to Nixon's mind was an exceedingly reasonable offer, revealed to the President and his advisers the plain truth that they would have to take more drastic action to end the war for the United States.

Hanoi's rebuff prompted the President to press ahead with a plan that had been brewing in his administration since before the inauguration: the gradual withdrawal of American troops from Vietnam. The announcement that American troops were coming home would mollify domestic critics and give the administration time to pursue the prospects for serious movement on the President's May proposals at the negotiating table in Paris.

On June 8 Nixon met with South Vietnamese President Thieu at Midway Island to discuss the administration's next moves, and at that troubled meeting the American President announced

by anti-war activists some months later when the first draft lottery under the new system was held in December 1969. With the effective pool of inductees who would see action in Vietnam restricted to the young men of a single year group whose birth dates were drawn in the first third of the lottery, the President's new system had anti-war leaders concerned: "'people with high priority numbers seem resigned to go in...and people who are free seem self-satisfied. Who's going to be left to criticize the draft?'" See "The Draft-The Luck of The Draw," Time, December 12, 1969, p. 26.

that the United States was withdrawing 25,000 troops from Vietnam.⁴⁴

With this announcement, the White House began an inexorable and immutable process. American troops were leaving Vietnam, and it was only a matter of time before none would remain. Nixon was well aware that Thieu strongly opposed the withdrawal of American troops.⁴⁵ And for his part, Thieu knew

⁴⁴ Kissinger reports that Midway was chosen to avoid anti-war riots which the President anticipated. White House Years, p. 272. See also "Confrontation at Midway," Newsweek, June 2, 1969, pp. 42-44. The anti-war movement in the United States had gained considerable momentum following a period of relative quiet during the first months of the Nixon administration. Organizers of a major demonstration against the war had targeted the early months of summer for action, but Nixon's announcement that 25,000 troops would be withdrawn effectively forestalled its execution. Later in the year, on October 15, 1969, the first major anti-war Moratorium was held, and the President tried a similar tactic to diminish the impact of the demonstration with markedly less success. See "The Strike Against the War," and "Four Faces of Protest," in Time, October 17, 1969, pp. 17-22.

⁴⁵ Nixon later recalled: "Thieu...was... deeply troubled. He knew that the first American withdrawals would begin an irreversible process, the conclusion of which would be the departure of all Americans from Vietnam." Nixon, RN: Memoirs, p. 392. For the text of the President's remarks following his meeting with Thieu see Public Papers: RMN, 1969, pp. 443-4. As an interesting aside, the press release of the Midway meeting by the American Embassy in Saigon did not disclose the explicit announcement of the withdrawal of 25,000 American troops. "Text of Joint Statement of Presidents Thieu and Nixon: Midway Island, June 8, 1969." Press Release no. 57-69, United States Mission in Vietnam, June 9, 1969. Contained in the Allan E. Goodman collection, manuscript box 9, subject file: U.S.- Policy in Vietnam, 1969-1971. Hoover Institution Archives. See also Terence Smith, "Statement is Believed Unlikely to Dispel Saigon's Unease," New York Times, June 9, 1969, pp. 1, 17; Hedrick Smith, "Leaders Agree First Cutbacks will Begin Within Thirty Days," New York Times, June 9, 1969, pp. 1, 16; and John W.

that Nixon was under some pressure to begin U.S. troop withdrawals. According to one South Vietnamese official who accompanied Thieu at Midway, Thieu suffered no delusions regarding the next phase of the conflict: "time was running out for us. We had to do something. We knew that the Americans were on an inexorable course of action. They had to get out."⁴⁶

The decision to begin unilaterally withdrawing American troops from Vietnam strongly supports the central argument of the present work which maintains that important foreign policy decisions often find their roots in a nation's domestic politics.⁴⁷ Moreover, such foreign policy decisions

Finney, "Laird Voices Hope of More Cutbacks in Vietnam in '69," New York Times, June 10, 1969, pp. 1, 16.

⁴⁶ Reported in Hung and Schecter, The Palace File, pp. 30-4.

⁴⁷ Nixon recalled that troop withdrawals combined with Vietnamization had begun to appeal to him early on as a useful tool for containing domestic criticism: "Early in the administration we had decided that withdrawing a number of American combat troops from Vietnam would demonstrate to Hanoi that we were serious in seeking a diplomatic settlement; it might also calm domestic public opinion by graphically demonstrating that we were beginning to wind down the war." Nixon, RN: Memoirs, p. 392 (emphasis added.) The subsequent announcements of additional unilateral troop withdrawals and the eventual abandonment in May 1971 of the official U.S. demand for mutual withdrawals offers further evidence supporting the central argument, and are examined in detail later in this and in the following chapter.

Nixon's justification in his memoirs that periodic withdrawals would demonstrate to Hanoi the seriousness with which the U.S. viewed finding a settlement is somewhat shallow, as there is little evidence that Hanoi believed

are often made despite the existence of structural/systemic conditions which would, on face, stimulate alternative behavior. Such was the case with the President's troop withdrawal announcement.

In June 1969 when the President publicly declared his intention to begin withdrawing American troops from Vietnam, little on the battlefield had changed; certainly the North Vietnamese had not established themselves decisively in control so as to animate a U.S. retreat. Neither had the United States and South Vietnam obtained a clear and overriding military advantage which would have allowed the U.S. to withdraw secure in the knowledge that the war was virtually won. Beyond the battlefield too, little external pressure existed for a such a dramatic gesture. The President had not yet undertaken his major foreign policy initiatives geared toward reshaping U.S.-Sino and U.S.-Soviet relations, and the position of those nations toward U.S. involvement in the war remained as they had stood for quite

otherwise about the U.S. Such a justification does, however, indicate that the President perceived a need to couch the action in terms relative to the foreign policy task at hand (negotiations) to avoid the accusation that the decision was taken principally for political reasons. Nevertheless, it is clear that in the wake of the revelations of the Cambodian operation and Hanoi's poor response to the President's proposals, domestic criticism pressed more heavily upon the administration than did North Vietnam's opinion of the sincerity of U.S. intentions. The troop withdrawals would clearly do more to alleviate the former than they would ensure the latter.

some time. The views of U.S. allies were similarly static and therefore did not generate pressure for the U.S. action.

The decision to begin unilateral troop withdrawals in June 1969 is grounded in the fact that the President felt the need to deliver more than rhetoric to end the war. Troop withdrawals would go a long way toward alleviating domestic political pressures, and Nixon's June meeting with Thieu, coming some months after the South Vietnamese President expressed the belief that 1969 could see the beginning of U.S. departure from his country, provided the perfect occasion to make the first announcement. The declaration that 25,000 American soldiers would be returning home infused the President's May 14 speech with vitality and represented the first tangible manifestation of his promise to end the war.

Though the troop withdrawal announcement had achieved the intended effect on the American domestic front, the static combat situation and diplomatic inactivity in Paris (halted by chief North Vietnamese negotiator Le Duc Tho's recall to Hanoi) prompted Nixon to intensify his search for a way to generate progress on a settlement before time and events caused the negotiations to end in failure.

...unless I could build some momentum behind our peace efforts over the next several weeks, they might be doomed to failure by the calendar. Once the summer was over and Congress and the colleges returned from vacation in September, a massive new antiwar tide would sweep the country during the fall and winter. Then, with the approaching dry

season in Vietnam, there was almost sure to be a renewed Communist offensive during the Tet holiday period in February. By early spring the pressures of the November 1970 elections would make congressional demands for more troop withdrawals impossible to stop and difficult to ignore.⁴⁸

On July 16, Nixon used an old personal friend, Jean Sainteny, as an intermediary to carry a personal letter directly to Ho Chi Minh.⁴⁹ In that letter Nixon attempted to impress the ailing Communist leader with the urgency with which he viewed finding a settlement. Receiving word that Hanoi desired a secret meeting between Le Duc Tho and Henry Kissinger, the White House took this as a positive response to the President's letter, and the secret channel opened August 4, 1969.

An official reply to Nixon's letter, rejecting the President's overture and insisting that the U.S. withdraw at once, arrived in Washington on August 30. Three days later Ho Chi Minh was dead.⁵⁰ If the administration held any hopes that a change in the North Vietnamese leadership would result in any substantive change in the position of Hanoi, despite

⁴⁸ Nixon, RN: Memoirs, p. 393.

⁴⁹ Nixon had used Sainteny once before, in December 1968, just following the Presidential election, to convey the President-elect's proposals for a negotiated settlement. That gesture was rebuffed.

⁵⁰ The exchange between Nixon and Ho Chi Minh was revealed by the President in November 1969. The text of the letters appeared in all the major newspapers. See, for example, "Text of Nixon-Ho Letter Exchange," Los Angeles Times, November 4, 1969, p. 11.

the initiation of secret contacts between the two countries, they were quickly disabused of this expectation. The new government under the leadership of Premier Pham Van Dong gave no indication of any less intransigence than was the case before the death of Ho Chi Minh.

Over the summer, the administration had been under constant pressure to deliver on its promise to end the war. In an article in Foreign Affairs, former Secretary of Defense Clark Clifford urged the White House to set a deadline for the total withdrawal of U.S. troops from Indochina.⁵¹ Though the President waived off the idea as out of touch with the present military situation in Vietnam, he confronted many such suggestions.⁵² But with little progress being made in Paris, the White House sought to demonstrate that other

⁵¹ Clark Clifford, "A Viet Nam Reappraisal," Foreign Affairs 47 (July 1969): 601-22. Clifford's article, and Nixon's reaction to the pressure it generated to increase the number and timing of the troop withdrawals, received some attention in the New York Times. See, for example, Max Frankel's articles "Clifford Urges Nixon to Curtail Vietnam Fighting," June 19, 1969, pp. 1, 3; and "President Hopes Pullout Will Top 200,000 Before '71, Rebuttal to Clifford," June 20, 1969, pp. 1, 6; and Robert B. Semple, Jr., "President's Aides Deny He Pledged A Pullout By 1970," June 21, 1969, pp. 1, 4.

⁵² See the President's remarks at a June 19, 1969 news conference contained in Public Papers: RMN, 1969, pp. 471-2; 476-7; and "Nixon is Accused of Overreacting," New York Times, June 22, 1969, p. 3.

aspects of its policies could carry the burden of ending U.S. involvement.⁵³

In September, the President announced that the troop ceiling in Vietnam would be reduced to 484,000 by December 15, 1969. This entailed a further withdrawal of some forty thousand additional troops, and an overall reduction of some sixty-five thousand soldiers from the 545,000 figure of the previous December.⁵⁴ The administration had hoped that the President's May proposals for peace, the beginning of the troop withdrawals, and the establishment of the secret negotiating channel would do much to get the North moving toward a settlement.

The central question of this thesis is of course, whether these actions were primarily taken for their ability to bring the war to a conclusion or for their effectiveness in reducing domestic tensions. Because politicians are sensitive to accusations that they make policy decisions for political reasons, public justifications for policy choices

⁵³ Between July 25 and August 3 the President traveled to 9 countries in a spectacular diplomatic effort to publicize the efforts his administration were making toward peace in Vietnam. The President stopped in Guam, Manila, Indonesia, Bangkok, Saigon, India, Pakistan, Romania, and England. During the trip he turned aside questions regarding further troop withdrawals. For the President's comments on the status of American military forces in Vietnam, see Public Papers: RMN, 1969, pp. 550-6; 584-5. Press coverage of the trip was characteristically extensive.

⁵⁴ Public Papers: RMN, 1969, p. 718.

are almost always in terms of the substantive requirements of the foreign policy situation. But we have seen that the general character of the President's overall strategy for ending the war lay rooted in his appreciation of domestic political realities. And the fact that the timing of the administration's moves during this period appears to coincide with times in which the President felt particularly constrained by domestic criticism of his policies suggests that international conditions did not motivate these choices as much as the domestic situation did.

With the latest public rejection by Hanoi, the tolerance of the American people began to show signs of wear. The administration's troop withdrawal announcements had encouraged the notion in the United States that steady progress was being made to end the war, and Hanoi's intransigence in Paris threatened to put the brakes on that progress. Thus, while the relative quiescence of the battlefield and a re-energized, though veiled, diplomatic channel both served to preserve the balance of positions between the belligerents. Nixon was losing the battle for domestic political support at home.⁵⁵ As he later recalled:

⁵⁵ At this time, of course, the public was not yet aware of the secret negotiating channel that had been set up between Kissinger and Le Duc Tho. And though in the United States the student unrest which characterized the Autumn of 1969 did not exclusively reflect unhappiness with the situation in Vietnam, frustration with the seemingly interminable war did serve to exacerbate tensions. Nixon was

...public support for our war effort was eroding. Our peace initiatives, the start of our withdrawal program, and our conciliatory speeches slowed the erosion, but they also whetted the appetites of the antiwar activists. As we approached the first anniversary of the bombing halt on November 1, 1969, I knew the time had come for a bold move to mobilize American support for our military efforts...[w]hat we needed most was time...If I was to have enough time for my policies to succeed, my first priority had to be to gather as much political support as possible for the war from the American people.⁵⁶

Toward that end, the administration began a flurry of activity to reduce the domestic pressure. And with the knowledge that actions to alleviate domestic dissatisfaction would only have temporary effects at best, the White House renewed international diplomatic efforts to generate some movement toward ending the war. On September 18, two days after announcing the second troop withdrawal, the President addressed the General Assembly of the United Nations, and urged the member nations to pressure Hanoi to join the United States in working for peace.⁵⁷ The following day, Nixon

well aware that presidential decisions regarding the war could go a long way toward reducing those tensions. He later recalled: "During the first months of my presidency Vietnam was not the primary issue in campus demonstrations largely because Johnson's bombing halt had suspended the most actively controversial aspect of the war, and my announced plans to establish an all-volunteer Army and our reform of the draft, which made it less threateningly disruptive, also helped in this regard." (Nixon, RN: Memoirs, p. 399).

⁵⁶ Nixon, No More Vietnams, p. 112.

⁵⁷ The text of the speech can be found in Public Papers: RMN, 1969, p. 724-731.

announced that the 50,000 scheduled draft calls for November and December would be cancelled and that the October call would be stretched over the final quarter of 1969. But in a September 26 news conference the President again rejected the notion of setting a pre-established deadline for a total troop withdrawal and downplayed the significance of domestic protests which were scheduled for mid-October.⁵⁸ Pressure was clearly on the President to act more decisively in ending the war.

Two days before the October 15 nation-wide Moratorium on the war, the White House announced that the President would deliver a major address on Vietnam on November 3. Though the President displayed indifference to the anti-war activity in public, privately he was deeply affected. The President

⁵⁸ Public Papers: RMN, 1969, pp. 748-58. See also "M-Day's Message to Nixon" and "Kaleidoscope of Dissent," Time, October 24, 1969, pp. 16-17, 18-20. Campus protests were not the only source of criticism of the President's policies. The President had been confronted for some time by Congressional efforts to restrict his authority in the war. In June Senator Charles Goodell of New York had proposed legislation that required the complete withdrawal of U.S. troops from Vietnam by the end of 1970. At the time of this press conference the Senate Foreign Relations Committee was again preparing to hold hearings on the question of Vietnam policy and the enactment of the Goodell proposal.

The early weeks of October were troubled ones for the President. Under fire not only for a lack of progress in the war, Nixon was fielding problems of civil rights, a controversial Supreme Court nominee, and a vitriolic public debate over the welfare system. The net effect was the impression that his administration was losing its grip. During the week of October 13, 1969, Newsweek, proclaimed "Mr. Nixon in Trouble," and Time reported that these days had clearly been "Nixon's Worst Week."

would not however, allow himself to appear to have been cowed by all of the negative pressure and publicity which dogged him relentlessly.⁵⁹ The approach in the November speech would be to direct the address to those Americans whom the White House believed were supportive of the President's policies but non-vocal in that support. Nixon's address would come to be known as the 'Silent Majority' speech.

Opening with a sweeping retrospective of U.S. involvement in Indochina, Nixon acknowledged that the reasons the U.S. had originally become involved in Vietnam had changed over the course of the past fifteen years. However, there remained, he argued, compelling reasons why the U.S. should persist in its efforts to aid South Vietnam. Principal among them were the fact that a bloodbath would ensue in South Vietnam the moment the U.S. left and the fact that all Communist nations would take the U.S. action as license to expand at will.⁶⁰ Nixon outlined his plan to end the war and

⁵⁹ See Melvin Small, Johnson, Nixon, and the Doves (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1988), pp. 182-188. Also see "What Withdrawal Would Really Mean," Time, October 24, 1969, pp. 20-23.

⁶⁰ Public Papers: RMN, 1969, pp. 901-909. For reaction to the speech, see "Max Frankel, 'Nixon Calls for Public Support as He Pursues His Vietnam Peace Plan on a Secret Pullout Timetable,'" New York Times, November 4, 1969, pp. 1, 17; Carroll Kilpatrick, "Nixon Bars 'Precipitate' Pullout; Asks U.S. Support of His Peace Plan," Washington Post, November 4, 1969, pp. 1, A9; Chalmers M. Roberts and Don Oberdorfer, "The Home Front Impact: Two Views," Washington Post, November 4, 1969, pp. 1, A9; and Robert J. Donovan, "Verdict on President's Speech Up to 'Great Silent

the steps he had taken to implement it so far. He closed by reiterating the arguments against immediate withdrawal. With an impassioned plea for patience and support, the President appealed directly to the American people. This calculated move was a political masterstroke; the President hoped to bypass the congressional and media pressure for an immediate withdrawal. His pleas for support and unity were, he later wrote, designed to alleviate those pressures: "...I sought to go over the heads of the antiwar opinion makers in the media and to appeal directly to the American people for unity."⁶¹

The speech had its intended effect. A Gallup poll taken immediately after the address showed that the President's approval rating had streaked to 77 percent and then stabilized at 68 percent.⁶² Public attitudes were mirrored in

Majority'," Los Angeles Times, November 4, 1969, pp. 1, 12. Senate critics, notably, Senator William Fulbright, powerful chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee expressed his disappointment in the President's address and said that his committee would again hold hearings on the administration's handling of the situation in Vietnam. "Fulbright and Mansfield Call for Viet Hearings," Los Angeles Times, November 5, 1969, p.28.

⁶¹ Nixon, No More Vietnams, p. 114.

⁶² See George Gallup, "77% of Those Listening Back Nixon," Los Angeles Times, November 5, 1969, p. 25; Chalmers M. Roberts, "Nixon Says Speech has Wide Support," Washington Post, November 5, 1969, pp. 1, A6; "Phone Calls Clog White House Lines," Los Angeles Times, November 4, 1969, p. 10; and Gallup Opinion Index, 54 (December 1969): 1-8. The

Congress where 181 Republicans and 119 Democrats co-sponsored a resolution for peace in Vietnam consistent with the President's plan. In the Senate, over half of the members signed a letter to Henry Cabot Lodge, head of the United States negotiating team in Paris, that endorsed efforts toward peace along the line of the President's proposals.⁶³ Nixon perceived this outpouring as a mandate to press on with his policy of negotiations and Vietnamization. Public reaction to the speech was just the shot in the arm he needed:

The November 3 speech was both a milestone and a turning point for my administration. Now, for a time at least, the enemy could no longer count on dissent in America to give them the victory they could not win on the

President's November 1969 rating jumped over 10 points from his late October rating of 56%.

Though a majority (55%) of those surveyed classified themselves as 'doves,' about the same number (56%) were 'satisfied' with the rate of U.S. troop withdrawals and overwhelmingly rejected (73%) proposals originating in the Senate that U.S. troops be completely and immediately withdrawn. Some analysts have argued that the swell of public support for the President was manufactured by the Republican National Committee. See, for example, Goodman, The Lost Peace, p. 103. See also the extended coverage of the aftermath of the President's speech, including Vice-President Agnew's assault on the Press and the emergence of moderate and right-wing supporters of the President in Time, November 21, 1969, pp. 16-26.

⁶³ See John W. Finney, "House Leaders Push for Vote Next Week on Pro-Nixon Vietnam Resolution; Senate War Hearing Delayed," New York Times, November 6, 1969, p. 11. The President personally responded to the Congressional demonstrations of support by appearing before the Senate and House of Representatives on November 13, 1969. Public Papers: RMN, 1969, pp. 930-5.

battlefield. I had the public support I needed to continue a policy of waging war in Vietnam and negotiating for peace in Paris until we could bring the war to an honorable and successful conclusion...[a]t the same time I was under no illusions that this wave of Silent Majority support could be maintained for very long. My speech had not proposed any new initiatives; its purpose had been to gain support for the course we were already following. I knew that under the constant pounding from the media and our critics in Congress, people would soon be demanding that new actions be taken to produce progress and end the war.⁶⁴

The White House hoped to sustain the momentum of November with an announcement in December that an additional 50,000 troops would be withdrawn by April 15, 1970.⁶⁵ The President made this decision fully aware that there had been "no progress whatever on the negotiating front since November," and disturbing evidence showing that level of enemy activity "has increased substantially."

Despite these developments, the President informed the American people that his decision was based on a "cautiously optimistic" report, from competent authority, that the South Vietnamese were making progress in their own defense.⁶⁶ But

⁶⁴ Nixon, RN: memoirs, pp. 410-11.

⁶⁵ "Address to the Nation on Progress Toward Peace in Vietnam," December 15, 1969. Public Papers: RMN, 1969, pp. 1025-8.

⁶⁶ Ibid., pp. 1025, 1027. The competent authority was the well-known counter-insurgency expert Sir Robert Thompson. The President read Thompson's book No Exit From Vietnam (New York: David McKay Company, 1969), had sent the British expert to Vietnam on a fact-finding trip, and used the after-

this official justification simply gives an inadequate account of the timing and size of the announced withdrawal.

The President claimed that his decision to withdraw more troops at this point meant that if the North Vietnamese did not negotiate with the U.S. now, they faced the impossible task of negotiating with a militarily strong and politically determined South Vietnam. This argument was not convincing to the North Vietnamese, and Hanoi remained intransigent in Paris. Indeed, the departure of U.S. troops from Vietnam moved them closer to their dual objectives of the Paris talks---the complete departure of the United States from South Vietnam and the overthrow of the Thieu regime in Saigon.

The U.S. withdrawals could not be seen to offer much to the South Vietnamese either. If a strengthened ARVN was a criterion along which the decision to withdraw would be made, standards for evaluating the degree to which the South Vietnamese had improved should have been established. They never were. Sir Robert Thompson's report to the President, was, by the President's own admission, 'cautiously optimistic.' Its summary, which the President quoted in part to the public, certainly stressed caution over optimism:

'I was very impressed by the improvement in the military and political situation in

action report of the visit from which to base public justification for his decisions.

Vietnam as compared with all previous visits and especially in the security situation, both in Saigon and the rural areas. A winning position in the sense of obtaining a just peace...and of maintaining an independent, non-Communist South Vietnam has been achieved but we are not yet through. We are in a psychological period where the greatest need is confidence...⁶⁷

Nixon's decision to withdraw additional troops can only be seen as politically motivated, particularly since the combat and diplomatic situations strongly militated against such a move. The announcement was simply designed to sustain the momentum of domestic support which the President believed he had in the wake of his November 3 address and in view of the dismal state of affairs in Paris and Vietnam.

The early months of 1970 presented few opportunities to announce additional troop withdrawals. Reports from Vietnam indicated that the Communists were planning a massive offensive, and combat on this scale threatened to disrupt the entire process of extricating the U.S. from the war, despite the fact that the President was on record as saying that the

⁶⁷ Public Papers: RMN, 1969, p. 1027. Thompson's evaluation of the relative improvement in South Vietnam uses the dismal state of affairs he reports in his book as a baseline referent. Thus even if the ability of the ARVN to handle South Vietnam's defense was much improved since earlier evaluations, this was not the same as saying that they were capable of withstanding a coordinated Communist advance intent on taking Saigon. Further he reports that a 'winning position...has been achieved.' Presumably this estimate considers the fact that the presence of large numbers of U.S. troops were part of that 'winning position.'

process of Vietnamization was 'irreversible.'⁶⁸ A surprising coup d'etat in Cambodia complicated the U.S. position further.

Lon Nol, a general in the Cambodian armed forces and virulent anti-communist, seized power while Prince Sihanouk was out of the country. Though Cambodia was technically neutral in the war, North Vietnam had long used bases in the Cambodian Mekong to supply its troops in South Vietnam. The presence of the North Vietnamese and their support for the Cambodian communists known as the Khmer Rouge, seriously threatened to topple the new government. Lon Nol held power only with great difficulty.

As events unfolded and the U.S. considered its response to Cambodian developments, Lon Nol made repeated requests to the United States for assistance, both in public and via private diplomatic channels.⁶⁹ War threatened to engulf all of

⁶⁸ See his remarks at a January 30, 1970 press conference. Public Papers: RMN, 1970, p. 38.

⁶⁹ Nixon attempted to take the first steps toward supporting Lon Nol but was frustrated by the speed with which events were unfolding, and the inactivity of his own bureaucracy. See the discussion in Kissinger, White House Years, pp. 470-5. See also Joseph Kraft, "US Dragged into Cambodia," New York Times, January 18, 1970, p. 23. The arguments surrounding U.S. actions in Cambodia remain volatile nearly twenty years later. At the time, the debate pit those who believed it was a blatant attempt by the administration to escalate the war against those who thought it a tactical necessity. For the basic opposing positions see William Shawcross, Sideshow: Kissinger, Nixon, and the Destruction of Cambodia (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1979), pp. 112-127; and Kissinger, White House Years, pp. 448-457.

Indochina, and Nixon's entire program for ending U.S. involvement in the conflict faced reversal. The negotiations in Paris had all but completely broken down and by March it had become clear that even the secret meetings between Kissinger and Le Duc Tho were leading nowhere. With the talks effectively deadlocked a frustrated White House terminated the contacts. In Cambodia events rapidly turned in favor of the Communists and Lon Nol intensified his calls for aid. The President and his advisers realized that the United States would have to provide military assistance to the Lon Nol government if it was to survive even though such a move would generate a nearly uncontrollable storm of domestic criticism.

Though the Cambodian situation demanded action, in the United States domestic protest was approaching a fever pitch. It was vitally important that the President alleviate some of the pressure in order to gain room to maneuver.

On April 20, in a stunning departure from a long-held position that U.S. troop withdrawals would not occur on a fixed time schedule, Nixon announced that 60,000 U.S. troops would be withdrawn by the close of 1970, and that an additional 90,000 troops would depart that country in 1971.⁷⁰

⁷⁰ For the text of the address, see Public Papers: RMN, 1970, p. 373-77. Pressure to announce a timetable for a complete withdrawal had plagued Nixon almost from the time he first announced his strategy to end the war. The arguments against a timetable related both to military necessity and domestic support. If the U.S. tied its troop withdrawals to

This 18-month projection represented the timetable for withdrawals that war critics had tried for months to get from Nixon. The fact that the announcement came at a time when the situation seemed to demand that the U.S. remain flexible and not restrict its options in the region illustrates the influence that domestic pressures were having on executive decision-making.

In this April 20 speech, the President stressed that U.S. involvement in Vietnam would end despite the fact that events seemed to demand, at the very least, a continued presence. The crisis in Cambodia, with its potential to engulf the entire Southeast Asian peninsula in war, and the widespread belief in the White House that only U.S. force had brought Hanoi to the negotiating table in the first place, strongly argued against further withdrawals. Military pressure on Hanoi was particularly important since negotiations in Paris had broken down and the North Vietnamese gave no sign that they had any incentive either to maintain appearances or pursue the substantive purpose of the talks.

an artificial time schedule, the North Vietnamese would have no incentive to negotiate---they could hold out indefinitely knowing that time was their ally. While the American people had tired of the war, the South Vietnamese were still not yet to the point where they could provide for their own security; the American presence was still required until Saigon was battle ready. While a timetable might satisfy some domestic elements, the President and his advisers believed that a majority of the domestic constituency could be satisfied with periodic demonstrations that progress was being made, and the protracted withdrawal schedule would buy the time that the South Vietnamese needed to ready themselves.

Clearly the diplomatic standoff and military crisis militated in favor of maintaining the status quo, but the unrest in the United States exerted pressure on the administration to deliver on its promises and threatened to upset the entire framework for ending the war that the White House had worked so hard to establish. The domestic criticism also shook the foundations of Nixon's political support in Congress during these early months of an election year when many Senators and Representatives strove to demonstrate sensitivity to their constituencies.

The administration's desires to show progress in its efforts to end U.S. involvement in the war (particularly since a decision on aid to Cambodia that would mean widening the U.S. military commitment in the region was imminent) accounted in large measure for the timing of the announcement and the size of the troop withdrawal. In his April 20 address, Nixon told the American people that

The decision...tonight means that we finally have in sight the just peace we are seeking. We can now say with confidence that pacification is succeeding. We can now say with confidence that the South Vietnamese can develop the capability for their own defense. And we can say with confidence that all American combat forces can and will be withdrawn.⁷¹

⁷¹ Public Papers: RMN, 1970, p. 376. See also Robert B. Semple, Jr., "Nixon to Pullout 150,000 From Vietnam in a Year; Says Hanoi Blocks Peace," New York Times, April 21, 1970, pp. 1, 16; Jack Foise, "Cambodia Becoming Another Laos for U.S.," Los Angeles Times, April 21, 1970, p. 12; and

As he had the previous November, Nixon justified his decision in terms of positive progress in Vietnamization, but he unquestionably intended that the announcement defuse domestic criticism. He later wrote: "Despite the impasse in the secret talks and the worsening military situation in Cambodia, I decided to go ahead with the troop withdrawal...the time had come to drop a bombshell on the gathering spring storm of antiwar protest."⁷²

The President's speech generated a modest gain in public opinion polls, showing that 53% approved of his handling of the war as against 46% just prior to his address.⁷³ But if the White House had hoped to reinforce the beliefs of the American public that it was indeed bringing the war to a close, this carefully orchestrated effort collapsed only two weeks later when the President officially acknowledged that U.S. and South Vietnamese forces had undertaken a major

Murrey Marder, "President Retains Flexibility In War," Washington Post, April 21, 1970, pp. 1, A6.

⁷² Nixon, RN: Memoirs, p. 448, emphasis added. The President's decision was clearly not based on military considerations. Indeed, a number of military officials were stunned that Nixon would proceed with withdrawals given the tenuous battlefield situation. See Ted Sell, "Nixon's Pullout Schedule Took Even Joint Chiefs By Surprise," Los Angeles Times, April 21, 1970, pp. 1, 9; and "GI Pullout Praised on Hill; Generals Cool," Washington Post, April 22, 1970, p. A11.

⁷³ Gallup Opinion Index 60 (June 1970), p. 2

ground offensive against North Vietnamese sanctuaries in Cambodia.⁷⁴

The White House went to some pains to stress the fact that this latest development in the war was consistent with the administration's overall strategy to end the conflict. On April 30 the President gave a nationally televised address in which he tied the Cambodian operation to the program of U.S. troop withdrawals.

A majority of the American people...are for the withdrawal of our forces from Vietnam. The action I have taken...is indispensable for the continuing success of that withdrawal program. A majority of the American people want to end this war rather than to have it drag on interminably. The action I have taken... will serve that purpose. A majority of the American people want to keep the casualties of our...men...at an absolute minimum. The action I have taken...is essential if we are to accomplish that goal. We have taken this action not for the purpose of expanding the war into Cambodia but for the purpose of ending the war in Vietnam...we will continue to make every effort to end this war through negotiation at the conference table

⁷⁴ The administration claimed that the original purpose of the Cambodian operation was to halt the offensive which the Communist's had launched against Lon Nol by destroying North Vietnamese sanctuaries in Cambodia. Once the operation was underway, however, Nixon made the decision to expand its objectives and attack and destroy as many of the North Vietnamese bases as possible. Kissinger's recollection of the events surrounding the decision to invade Cambodia offers a particularly interesting discussion of the domestic political considerations which influenced the timing and nature of the key decisions. See White House Years, pp. 483-509. See also, Robert B. Semple, Jr., "'Not An Invasion'," New York Times, May 1, 1970, pp. 1, 2.

rather than through fighting on the battlefield...⁷⁵

Between April 30 and June 30, U.S. forces advanced over twenty miles into Cambodia and official reports maintained that the operation had crippled the North Vietnamese in the region of the Mekong Delta. To the White House, the decline in the number of American casualties, discernable almost immediately, offered the most important evidence of the operation's success. The administration estimated that the operation effectively reduced American casualties in the war by nearly half.⁷⁶ In the minds of White House officials, the Cambodian operation had accomplished two objectives: it prevented the fall of the Cambodian government to the North Vietnamese; but more importantly, it severely handicapped Hanoi's ability to effectively wage war in an important region of the South, thereby relieving pressure on South Vietnamese forces and allowing Vietnamization to proceed.

At home, however, the operation had done enormous damage to the administration's credibility. Prior to the action, the President had achieved some measure of agreement that his policies were bringing the war to an end; the Cambodia invasion shattered that agreement. On the day following the President's address, the New York Times editorialized that

⁷⁵ Public Papers: RMN, 1970, p. 408.

⁷⁶ This is claimed by Kissinger in White House Years, p. 508; and Nixon in RN: Memoirs, p. 467.

the operation represented 'a virtual renunciation of the President's promise of disengagement from South East Asia.'⁷⁷ Despite the President's contention that the action was 'not an invasion of Cambodia,' the operation presented the appearance of a complete policy reversal and engendered widespread distrust of the administration's claims that the action reflected strategic necessity.⁷⁸

The mood of the country had turned hostile. In early May four students were tragically killed at Kent State University in Ohio, and just five days later a massive protest involving nearly 100,000 demonstrators in Washington prompted the police to position buses, end to end, in a protective ring around the White House.⁷⁹ In Congress, members had already

⁷⁷ New York Times, May 1, 1970, p. 34. See also, Robert Kaiser, "The View From Saigon: No End in Sight," Washington Post, May 31, 1970, pp. B1, B4; Terrence Smith, "US Aides in Saigon Question Policy," New York Times, June 3, 1970, pp. 1, 14; James P. Stuba, "Cambodian Incursion by US Appears to Unite Foe," New York Times, June 29, 1970, pp. 1, 15; Max Frankel, "Nixon's Stress is on Credibility," New York Times, July 1, 1970, p. 17; and Robert G. Kaiser, "Officials Question Cambodian Achievement," Washington Post, July 2, 1970, p. 11.

⁷⁸ Senator Jacob Javits (D/NY), an outspoken critic of the war and of Nixon's exercise of Executive discretion in war-making, accused the President of committing the United States to further involvement in the region. John W. Finney, "Key Congressmen Briefed; Reaction Called Favorable," New York Times, May 1, 1970, pp. 1, 5.

⁷⁹ Leonard Downie, Jr., "Demonstrations by Big Crowd Starts at Noon," Washington Post, May 9, 1970, pp. 1, A7; and Richard Harwood, "Throng Jams Elipse to Protest War--Some Eruptions Occur at Night," Washington Post, May 10, 1970, pp. 1, A12..

begun taking steps to prevent the President from further action that could be construed as widening the conflict. Following nearly two months of debate, the Senate passed an amendment sponsored by Senators John Cooper (R-Kentucky) and Frank Church (D-Idaho) which prohibited funding for U.S. forces in Cambodia.⁸⁰ Twice that summer, on June 24 and July 10, the Senate repealed the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution which, in August 1964, had given Johnson wide-ranging authority to respond to events in Indochina.⁸¹

Despite these setbacks, the administration achieved a minor victory in September when the Senate voted down the McGovern-Hatfield amendment which called for a ceiling on U.S. troop strength in Vietnam to just under 300,000 by April 30, 1971 and the authorization of funds only to support the withdrawal

⁸⁰ This amendment was attached to a supplementary foreign military sales bill (HR 15628) but was later dropped when the Senate and House reached an impasse over the amendment. They did agree to include a revised version of the amendment in the supplemental foreign aid authorization bill (HR 19911) which was passed in the Senate on December 16, 1970. See "Looking for Outer Limits," Newsweek, June 22, 1970, p. 19.

⁸¹ The first of the repeals was approved as an amendment to the military sales bill and sponsored by Senator Robert Dole (R-Kansas). This move to demonstrate that the Republicans were as serious as the Democrats in their desire to end the war was seen by supporters of the Cooper-Church amendment as an attempt by Republican Senators to gain political acceptability in an election year. The second repeal came only weeks later in the form of a concurrent resolution (S Con Res 64, July 10, 1970). Nixon signed the final bill repealing the amendment on January 13, 1971.

of remaining troops by December 31, 1971.⁸² This victory for the White House, along with other events (In Paris, a reconstituted U.S. negotiating team headed by former U.S. Ambassador David Bruce and Phillip Habib undertook a reassessment and evaluation of the current state of the negotiations; the President traveled abroad to Europe; and Congressional and state pre-election campaigning had begun in earnest) caused the furor over Cambodia to fall into the background of the domestic political scene. While the President offered no new troop withdrawal announcements, beneath the veneer of inactivity on the war Nixon and his advisers were formulating a new strategy to break the deadlock in Paris. In the wake of the Cambodian tumult, and with the elections only weeks away, the White House felt the need to present some sort of initiative to get the negotiations moving and begin to re-establish control over winding the war down.

In an address to the nation on October 6, the President called for a cease-fire in place, a halt to U.S. bombing in the region, expanded peace talks and the mutual release of all POWs.⁸³ Generally bi-partisan support greeted this

⁸² Robert M. Smith, "Senate Defeats 'End War' Move By Vote of 55-39," New York Times, September 2, 1970, pp. 1, 10; and David E. Rosenbaum, "As Summer Advanced, Amendment Lobby Waned," New York Times, September 2, 1970, p. 10.

⁸³ Public Papers: RMN, 1970, pp. 825-8.

address and bought the President some relief from the intense criticism. A number of prominent senators, Charles Percy, Mike Mansfield and William Fulbright among them, endorsed the President's proposals and the domestic media echoed their praise.⁸⁴ Shortly thereafter, the White House moved to capitalize on the outpouring of support by announcing the further reduction of 40,000 troops in the authorized troop strength by Christmas.⁸⁵ Nixon's speech, combined with the withdrawal policy, effectively neutralized the war as a campaign issue, and the country went into November largely unencumbered by intra-governmental strife over Vietnam.

In Paris, however, the North Vietnamese rejected the President's initiative with characteristic dispatch and scorn.⁸⁶ The frustrating pattern of diplomatic parry and thrust re-emerged and rendered the President's offer largely meaningless. Soon, calls for the United States to set a deadline for the full and complete withdrawal of its troops

⁸⁴ A New York Times editorial on October 9, 1970 called the President's plan 'forward looking' and 'flexible,' and placed the burden of settlement on Hanoi. The President did raise suspicions that the timing of his announcement was designed to diminish the impact of the nation-wide moratorium on the war scheduled for October 15, as well as to improve Republicans' chances in the upcoming November elections. See Robert M. Smith, "Savannah Turns Out For President," New York Times, October 9, 1970, p. 41.

⁸⁵ Public Papers: RMN, 1970, p. 836.

⁸⁶ See Xuan Thuy's remarks at the 37th Plenary Session of the Paris Talks of October 9, 1970. Paris Talks, Reel IV, 37th session, October 9, 1970.

resurfaced in the media and in Congress. Kissinger, particularly frustrated by the turn of events, recalled that the domestic pressures threatened to take policy-making out of the hands of the administration.

By the end of 1970 we ran the risk that our Vietnam strategy would turn into a debate about the rate of our unilateral withdrawal. Even within the administration there was tremendous weariness. The constant pressures that transformed even the most minor military action into a test of credibility, the endless testimony before Congressional committees, the incessant probing by the media...all tended to work against a coherent strategy.⁸⁷

With the Communists content, and apparently able, to wait their opponents out in Paris, the U.S. held little true bargaining strength. Hanoi had few reasons to cooperate toward settlement; discussion of the American proposals would not guarantee that the U.S. would withdraw any more rapidly than it was currently, and negotiation could result in the Communists making some concessions. For the North Vietnamese, intransigence was the best strategy. Antiwar critics in the United States took the lack of progress in Paris as a sign that the U.S. offers were somehow inadequate. Anxious for the war to end, these critics pressured the White House to increase the numbers of troops withdrawn and decrease the time it would take to accomplish.

⁸⁷ Kissinger, White House Years, p. 984. Kissinger fully attributes the decision to accelerate the withdrawal schedule that the President announced in April to the administration's response to the domestic pressures. See his discussion on pp. 984-5.

By the close of 1970, antiwar sentiment in the United States had reached such an intense level that the President could no longer easily balance negotiations and Vietnamization in his quest for time to secure a satisfactory settlement. Convinced that further announcements of troop withdrawals parcelled out over months, or even weeks, would no longer effectively handle the increasingly strident domestic criticism, the President and his advisers decided to exert maximum military pressure on the North Vietnamese. If the Communists could be substantially weakened through aggressive military maneuvers, greater numbers of U.S. troops could be withdrawn and South Vietnam would have more opportunity to strengthen its defenses. But the White House knew that however ready the South Vietnamese became, by the end of 1971, or 1972 at the latest, American forces would be reduced to a token contingent and the war, for the U.S. at least, would end.⁸⁸ Thus now even military maneuvers were considered primarily for their impact on the domestic

⁸⁸ Kissinger argued that the strategy of applying military pressure to North Vietnam would allow the United States to reduce the bulk of its forces and level of commitment during 1971. If a negotiated settlement were not concluded then, they faced the sure prospect of a Communist Offensive in Spring 1972. If that were to happen, he wrote, "The outcome of the war would then depend on whether the South Vietnamese, aided only by American air power, would be able to blunt the assault." The war would end and peace would come, he continued, "...either at the end of 1971 or at the end of 1972---either by negotiation or by a South Vietnamese collapse." White House Years, p. 986.

political environment in the United States and only secondarily for their battlefield significance.

Time Runs Out

Events during the first half of the new year drove home to administration officials the reality that the White House had lost the ability to halt the withdrawals or moderate their pace, despite its claims that it would if the situation on the battlefield deteriorated. The United States was leaving Vietnam, and if Saigon was to have any hope of surviving the departure of the Americans, the combat ability of the South Vietnamese military (ARVN) would have to be improved. The effort to turn the ARVN into a fighting force capable of dealing with the North Vietnamese moved into high gear.

When the U.S. had gone into Vietnam in 1965, it did not so much assist South Vietnam in its battles as it bore principal responsibility for fighting those battles; this situation would have to be reversed. South Vietnam needed greater numbers of more sophisticated weapons, an increase in the size of the ARVN, and substantial improvement in its military training and performance in battle. To address the munition shortfalls, the United States sent large quantities of anti-tank weapons, grenade launchers and rifles to South Vietnam, and the ranks of the Vietnamese armed forces swelled as a result of an expanded conscription finally ordered in the wake of the 1968 Tet Offensive. Training and discipline,

however, remained by far the most difficult aspect of Vietnamization. The hierarchy of the Army was rife with politically loyal but militarily inept officers; strong leadership was the exception in ARVN units and as a consequence, the cohesion and discipline so necessary to successful military training and combat operations suffered.

Despite its dubious state of readiness, the ARVN had its first 'solo' test in January 1971 in an operation aimed at cutting off the Ho Chi Minh trail in Laos. Intelligence sources confirmed that Hanoi had resupply operations in preparation for an anticipated spring offensive currently underway, and military advisers counselled the White House that a pre-emptive strike on Communist routes through Laos would seriously hamper the communists' operations and consequently foil the attack plans. But after the domestic uproar over the Cambodian invasion the White House was well aware that domestic public opinion would brook no involvement of U.S. forces. The President decided that the brunt of the operation would be borne by the South Vietnamese with American air and artillery support.⁸⁹

⁸⁹ Nixon and Kissinger both later acknowledged that domestic factors contributed heavily to this decision. See, respectively, RN: Memoirs, pp. 498-9, and White House Years, p. 990. Kissinger's account of the events leading up to the actual invasion reveal far more about Nixon's political maneuverings to gain support for the plan within the administration than does the former President's. See, particularly, White House Years, pp. 994-6.

The Laos operation got off to an unsure start, and the early chaos validated reports that the South Vietnamese military simply was not prepared to conduct such a massive, conventional assault. After several days, however, the situation appeared to be improving, and the South Vietnamese made steady progress toward pushing back the Communist forces. The success was short-lived however. After several weeks of rigorous combat, ARVN units began a retreat to South Vietnam under the cover of intense U.S. bombardment.

In the mind of Nixon and his senior advisers, the Laos operation was a qualified success. Psychologically and emotionally, however, it was a disaster. Reports of the action unleashed a storm of protest in the United States, despite the administration's claims of victory. In Congress, over sixty members of the House of Representatives sponsored legislation to prohibit funds for U.S. military activity in Cambodia, and Senators George McGovern and Mark Hatfield reintroduced legislation requiring the total withdrawal of American forces from Indochina.⁹⁰

Vocal antiwar critics accused the White House of unrestrained militarism in the region and prolonging the war. The American media maligned the purpose of the operation and

⁹⁰ "The War: New Alarm, New Debate," Time, February 8, 1971, p. 11.

derided the performance of the South Vietnamese military.⁹¹ In the eyes of many Americans, Nixon could offer no acceptable explanation for the action, and his credibility suffered further blows with the conviction in March of Army Lieutenant William Calley, Jr. of war crimes associated with the My Lai massacre, and the release of the Pentagon Papers shortly thereafter.

The administration had made an attempt to defuse some of the criticism by announcing in April that 'Vietnamization had succeeded,' and therefore the pace of U.S. troop withdrawals could be accelerated. On April 7, using large charts to illustrate his major points, Nixon walked his audience through the measures he had taken since assuming office to

⁹¹ See, for example, Alvin Shuster, "The Campaign in Laos: Early Assessment Indicates that Hanoi Won at Least a Propaganda Victory," New York Times, March 24, 1971, p. 4; James Reston, "Divided Command in Saigon," New York Times, March 26, 1971, p. 37. Reston reported that the U.S. and South Vietnamese military commanders could not agree on how to conduct the operation and their confusion led to disaster on the battlefield. Gloria Emerson, "Spirit of Saigon's Army Shaken in Laos," New York Times, March 28, 1971, pp. 1, 14; Iver Peterson, "Americans in South Vietnam Attribute the Setback in Laos to Faulty Planning and Intelligence," New York Times, March 30, 1971, p. 15; Craig Whitney, "Enemy Raids Cast Doubt on Claims of Success in Laos," New York Times, April 5, 1971, pp. 1, 9; "Aftermath of a 'Victory'," Newsweek, April 12, 1971, pp. 42, 45. A New York Times editorial on April 11, 1971, challenged the President's claim that Vietnamization had succeeded. Time magazine covered the operation extensively. See particularly its coverage of February 15, 1971, "Indochina: A Cavalryman's Way Out," pp. 24-32, and "Indochina: Nixon's Strategy of Withdrawal," March 1, 1971, pp. 19-20.

reduce the level of U.S. involvement in the conflict.⁹² The President acknowledged that South Vietnam could not yet manage on its own, but, he declared, "The day the South Vietnamese can take over their own defense is in sight." He stressed the fact that the goal of a South Vietnam capable of defending itself against Communist aggression necessitated continued U.S. support, and that that support was becoming ever more affordable to this country because progress in Vietnamization meant fewer U.S. troops in Vietnam and fewer U.S. casualties. The President hoped to avoid further pressure for an immediate and unilateral withdrawal by highlighting the fact that his administration had reduced the human costs of the war---for the United States at least---during the course of implementing its plan to end U.S. involvement.

In the United States, most of those who pressed for an immediate American withdrawal harbored no delusions that the departure of the United States would mean that the war in Vietnam would end for all participants. Though the antiwar movement certainly contained sincere and committed activists who opposed warfare of any type for anyone, their numbers paled in comparison to the ranks of those who principally opposed active U.S. combat. It was this larger group whom

⁹² Public Papers: RMN, 1971, pp. 522-7. For a critical review of the President's speech, see "The President Digs in on Vietnam," in Time, April 19, 1971, p. 11.

the President and his strategists targeted with their plan to Vietnamize the war. As Vietnamization reduced the numbers of American casualties, it helped to reduce the domestic opposition to the fighting that needed to go on to secure a negotiated settlement acceptable to the White House. But this strategy was losing its potency. The Laos invasion and its political repercussions convinced many observers that the administration required frequent and intense monitoring to guarantee adherence to its war termination plan.

On June 13, 1971, the New York Times began publishing installments of a classified Defense Department study which detailed the factors contributing to the early years of American involvement in Vietnam. Over the summer of 1971, the public took a rare inside look at the decision-making which had embroiled the U.S. in war half a world away. The reports fueled antiwar criticism to even higher levels and fortified objections to further U.S. involvement of any kind in Vietnam, even if it was at declining levels. The President had hoped to prevent the Times from publishing the series, but failed when the Supreme Court ruled for the newspaper.⁹³ The exposé, combined with the court battle to

⁹³ Nixon contends that his decision to prosecute the New York Times stemmed from his conviction that the government has responsibility for determining what effect the release of classified documents can have on the country's national security. See Nixon, RN: Memoirs, pp. 508-514. For the New York Times' view, see Hedrick Smith, E.W. Kenworthy, and Fox Butterfield, The Pentagon Papers: The Secret History of

prevent its release, only exacerbated tensions between the White House and the media. With the furor over the Laos invasion and details of the My Lai case reinforcing the impression that the war was a mistake, media and Congressional criticism continued unabated.⁹⁴

For its part, Hanoi was fully aware of the domestic vulnerabilities of the President and of the tight linkage between the administration's war policies and those vulnerabilities. The existence of public and secret negotiating channels presented the North Vietnamese with a powerful tool which they used to capitalize on the domestic pressure felt by the American President. By alternating public intransigence with private accommodation the Communists' squeezed the White House between the demands of the American public and their own demands at the negotiating table, and betrayed their astute sensitivity to the domestic political situation in the United States.⁹⁵

the Vietnam War as published by the New York Times (New York: Bantam Books, 1971), especially pp. ix-xvii.

⁹⁴ During this period, nearly every major newspaper, magazine and broadcast network spoke out against the administration's handling of the war. Kissinger's frustration at the domestic dissatisfaction clearly emerges as he recalls the media and congressional assault on the White House. See White House Years, pp. 1012-15.

⁹⁵ Though beyond the scope of the immediate work, I believe an analysis of the content and timing of the presentation of North Vietnam's negotiating positions and battlefield activity within the context of the American political situation would reveal Hanoi's appreciation for the

U.S. domestic events compounded the administration's difficult dealings with the North Vietnamese in Paris. The White House had to remain ever mindful that Hanoi was not its only audience in the Paris proceedings. The American public's response to events at the negotiating table, and Hanoi's appreciation for and manipulation of the significance of the public's impact, had a major influence in the formulation, timing and publicity of U.S. offers and counter proposals in Paris.

In a stunning move aimed at both the American public and the North Vietnamese, Nixon announced in mid-July that he would visit the People's Republic of China.⁹⁶ The President hoped that Hanoi would perceive a threat to its alliance with the Communist giant and the American people would sense that the President was taking every step in a sincere effort to pursue peace in the region.

The significance of Nixon's China announcement for the Paris talks was diminished somewhat with the resignation, for health reasons, of Chief U.S. negotiator David Bruce later in the month. Hanoi used the lag between the departure of Bruce

domestic political susceptibilities of the White House and would disclose a concerted effort by North Vietnam to exploit the President's political vulnerabilities to ultimate advantage.

⁹⁶ Public Papers: RMN, 1971, p. 819-20. The specific date of the President's trip, February 21, 1972, was not announced until November.

and the arrival and full participation of his successor, William J. Porter, to present a number of reformulated but familiar proposals, which the United States refused to accept in this period of transition. Many observers saw the lack of U.S. response as a sign that the White House was not as intent upon resolving the conflict as it claimed.⁹⁷

By the fall of 1971, it was clear that the President could not keep the costs of the war down to acceptable levels in order to achieve an acceptable negotiated settlement because, to the vocally antiwar partisans, no costs were acceptable. Even to many moderate Americans, the domestic unrest for which the war bore partial responsibility though most of the focus, represented costs of the war and was itself reason enough to end U.S. involvement. Yet the President refused to take the step of ordering a unilateral and immediate withdrawal. The administration remained steadfast, because, among other things, of the presence of hundreds of American POWs in North Vietnamese prison camps. The Administration repeatedly raised the existence of some 1600 American prisoners of war held in North Vietnam as justification for continued U.S. presence in Vietnam. Perhaps because the

⁹⁷ See the transcript of the Presidential News Conference of August 4, 1971. Public Papers: RMN, 1971, p. 853, and Kissinger, White House Years, pp. 1021-31. See also the headline articles in the Washington Post, July 8, 1971; Newsweek, July 12, 1971; and the New York Times, July 15, 1971.

objective of preserving the security of the Saigon government no longer evoked the sympathies of Americans, the President shifted rationales to maintain some policy legitimacy and support, and often cited American POWs as justification not to withdraw totally from South Vietnam.⁹⁸

The Presidential elections in South Vietnam scheduled for October 3, 1971 did nothing to enhance the administration's case for continued support of the Thieu regime.⁹⁹ Accusations of corruption and election fraud fueled American suspicions of Saigon and served as a focus for Congressional criticism of the administration's justification for continuing the war.

⁹⁸ In fact, during this period in 1971 when the President was under the most intense pressure to announce a timetable for a total withdrawal, the issue of the POWs surfaced more and more frequently. See for example the press conferences and public interviews of March 4, April 16 and 29, June 1, and November 12; the President's appearance on ABC television in an interview with Howard K. Smith on March 22; and the impassioned reference to the POWs in the President's April 7 address to the nation (Public Papers: RMN, 1971, pp. 389, 540-1, 595, 692, 1101-4, 454-5, and 524, respectively.) In his news conference of October 12, 1971, the President cites the issue of American POWs, on par with the preservation of Saigon, as the chief reasons for the continued U.S. presence in Vietnam. (Public Papers: RMN, 1971, p. 1034).

⁹⁹ Nixon addressed the considerable controversy surrounding these elections in his news conference of September 16, 1971 (Public Papers: RMN, pp. 952-4.) See also the following coverage in the New York Times: Iver Peterson, "Buddhists Urge Election Boycott," September 17, 1971, pp. 1, 2; Alvin Schuster, "'We Are All Tired of War and Thieu Means War'," October 3, 1971, p. 4-1; "Balloting Choice In Vietnam was Thieu or Trash Can," October 4, 1971, p. 2; and Craig R. Whitney, "Tally Questioned in Danang Voting," October 5, 1971, p. 9.

The President hoped to deflect attention from the questionable election by announcing on October 12 that he would visit the Soviet Union.¹⁰⁰ And to further dilute the domestic backlash with the pre-ordained election results, Nixon called a news conference on November 12 to announce the withdrawal of some 45,000 troops over a period of two months. The White House hoped that this move would demonstrate the administration's confidence in the newly re-elected Thieu government---despite its dubious claim to office. This latest reduction would bring the U.S. troop ceiling to approximately 139,000. The President announced further that a decision regarding additional increments of troop withdrawals could be expected by February.¹⁰¹

With the cumulation of troop withdrawal announcements, the opening of diplomatic doors to the People's Republic of China and the Soviet Union, and the steady transformation of battlefield responsibility to the South Vietnamese, the Nixon administration had substantially altered the picture of the war. Though a negotiated settlement appeared as elusive as

¹⁰⁰ Public Papers, RMN, 1971, p. 1030. For reaction to the President's announcement see Robert B. Semple, Jr., "President Says Trip is 'Independent' of Journey to Peking," New York Times, October 13, 1971, pp. 1, 18; Max Frankel, "Nixon Trip: Diplomatic-Political Gain Seen," New York Times, October 13, 1971, p. 18; and Murrey Marder, "Nixon's Dual Summits Cut Risks," Washington Post, October 14, 1971, p. A16.

¹⁰¹ Public Papers: RMN, 1971, p. 1101.

ever---the public and private sessions in Paris had yielded little since January 1969---the administration had made progress toward ending U.S. involvement in the region. To Nixon's mind, the entire strategy for terminating the war was working, but the troop withdrawals was the element most responsible for any measure of progress. The President later recalled:

I doubt that we could have continued fighting the war if we had not been gradually withdrawing our troops. Since 1969, we had been faced with the danger of Congress legislating an end to our involvement. Anti-war senators and congressmen had been introducing resolutions to force us to trade a total withdrawal of our troops for the return of our POWs. By 1972 the Senate was regularly passing these measures, and the votes in the House were getting close. We were able to prevent the passage of these bills only because our withdrawal announcements provided those whose support for the war was wavering with tangible evidence that our involvement was winding down.¹⁰²

Yet the war was still far from over. Nixon remained determined that he would not concede to demands that he abruptly order a total U.S. withdrawal until South Vietnam could provide adequately for its own defense. Though disappointed in the lack of progress in Paris, the White House remained convinced that negotiation, rather than decisive military victory, was the only way that that objective might be achieved. But reality painted a gloomy

¹⁰² Nixon, No More Vietnams, p. 142.

picture; settlement appeared no closer at the end of 1971 than at the beginning of 1969. Nevertheless, the choice remained stark: pull up stakes and depart, or fight, at the lowest possible level, while continuing to negotiate. But the President was running out of time. No longer convinced that the objectives of the war were worth the price being paid to achieve them, the American polity began to reject the President's plan in earnest and marshal the political means to force the administration to end U.S. involvement. The costs had become too high, and the legitimacy conveyed to the President's strategy to end the war began to be withdrawn.

Summary

For states ending their involvement in a limited war, the decision that the war must be deliberately brought to an end, and not left to evolve to its exhausted conclusion, confronts the national leadership as the first step in war termination. After deciding that the war must end, the next decision is one of how that end will be brought about. Johnson's choice in March 1968 to de-escalate the Vietnam war represents the first of these decisions for the United States; Nixon's decision to negotiate a settlement to the war corresponds to the second.

This work has argued that domestic political factors play an important and influential role in war termination decision-making. This is certainly the case with Nixon's

decision to end the war through negotiations, Vietnamization and U.S. troop withdrawals. Though Richard Nixon took office in January 1969 genuinely convinced that the United States' presence in Vietnam was necessary to guarantee the survivability of the Saigon government and check the spread of Communism in Asia, the time for fighting had passed.¹⁰³ American public consensus had coalesced around another objective to which Presidential policy-making in Vietnam had to address itself---ending U.S. involvement in the war.

The Nixon administration devised a complex plan which would both end the war and accomplish the objectives which were believed still worthwhile. The strategy fundamentally rest on controlling the costs of the war---particularly the human costs---during the time it would take to reach a negotiated settlement. The White House adopted a three-pronged approach: reduce the level of fighting through Vietnamization and gradual troop withdrawals; contain domestic criticism and bolster American's political will to accept the fighting that did go on by demonstrating serious efforts to negotiate toward settlement and steady progress in Vietnamization; and recast and devalue objectives being pursued, by both diminishing the importance of their achievement and lowering the criteria by which achievement

¹⁰³ For a critical discussion of how U.S. war aims changed over the early course of the war, see Hugh M. Arnold's "Official Justifications for America's Role in Indochina, 1949-67," Asian Affairs 3 (September-October 1975): 31-48.

would be measured. The present chapter has focused on the administration's attention to the first two means of controlling costs. The last method---devaluation of the objectives being pursued---is left for Chapter 5.

Throughout the Nixon administration, the objectives for the U.S. effort in the war remained essentially to control the spread of Communism, ensure a stable South Vietnamese Government and end U.S. combat involvement in Indochina. Though certainly never officially acknowledged, the standards by which the Administration would judge the first two of these objectives to have been successfully achieved were markedly less fixed than those against which the objective of ending U.S. involvement in the war was measured. Indeed, as will be discussed in the next chapter, the standards for successful achievement of these two were relaxed, in part, to allow the President to end the war for the United States, and in part so that he could do so having realized at least some measure of them as well.

From 1969 to 1972, the President sought to sustain domestic legitimacy for his policies by demonstrating that the objectives the U.S. sought were desirable, and that his plan for achieving them---negotiation and Vietnamization---would work. This was not easy. The White House confronted those on the political left who challenged the desirability of the objectives and those on the political right who oppose negotiations and withdrawals. To compound the difficulties,

mounting domestic criticism threatened to make the very ending of U.S. involvement in Indochina more important than either the containment of Communism or support for the government of South Vietnam. In the minds of many Americans, these latter two objectives had become suspect. Sentiment had grown that North Vietnam's aggression into South Vietnam would probably not trigger the 'domino' effect in Southeast Asia, and the hopelessly inefficient and brazenly corrupt Saigon regime seemed increasingly unworthy of our defense.

To legitimate the objectives which the administration still believed worthwhile, the President marshalled the symbolic importance of the U.S. continuing to support the South Vietnamese. The U.S. had to remain steadfast in Vietnam, Nixon and his top advisers argued; acquiescence would signal unreliability to our friends and weakness to our adversaries. Additionally, since the fighting began some thirty thousand Americans had lost their lives in combat and to abandon our goals at this stage would completely erase that sacrifice, as well as forfeit the lives of hundreds of American POWs.

To convince the American public that the plan to achieve these objectives would work, the administration relied on manipulating the complex relationship between negotiations, Vietnamization and troop withdrawals. The process by which the U.S. would hand over combat responsibility to the South Vietnamese conveyed cognitive legitimacy to the President's plan in very subtle and implicit ways---neither the President nor his advisers believed that they could hold the country

together if they made the decision that the U.S. would fight its way out of the war, but they also rejected a precipitous U.S. withdrawal from South Vietnam because it would mean forsaking worthwhile goals. In the minds of the decision-makers, negotiations appeared the only way to end the conflict satisfactorily. Negotiations, however, would take time, and obtaining an acceptable settlement from the North Vietnamese would take additional combat. To the policy-makers, Vietnamization made the time-consuming and costly process of negotiations feasible. Fighting would go on while the talks proceeded, but it would involve fewer and fewer Americans. With decreasing numbers of Americans killed in combat, Vietnamization would buy time for the administration to pursue settlement through negotiations.

By lowering the human costs of the war, Vietnamization attenuated domestic criticism of U.S. involvement in Vietnam; as the public saw the numbers of Americans killed in combat steadily declining, the general feeling developed that the administration's plan to end U.S. involvement was working. Having long realized that American objectives in Vietnam could never be achieved through combat, the public developed a faint sense that perhaps they might be through negotiations.

Vietnamization provided the justification for the steady withdrawal of American troops from Vietnam, and both Vietnamization and the troop withdrawals illustrate how the

domestic political context of war frequently determines the important decisions that a nation's leadership makes in war. Combat necessity did not suggest the policy of Vietnamization; military doctrine or contingencies did not demand its implementation. The choice to Vietnamize, or 'de-Americanize,' the war, and the decision to withdraw American troops from Vietnam reflected the domestic political realities that Nixon confronted in the United States.

Though increasingly strident calls for immediate withdrawal gained some momentum because of the frustrating lack of progress in Paris, the President's manifold strategy enabled him to stay some of the opposition by demonstrating progress toward ending the war through periodic announcements of troop withdrawals, and evidence of progress in training and equipping the ARVN to bear the principal combat burden. Both tactics---troop withdrawal and Vietnamization---had the effect of reducing American combat casualties; a result which, in turn, went a long way in undermining domestic criticisms, and bought time for the President to attempt to pursue a satisfactory settlement through negotiations.

Chapter 5

The Decision to Accept Terms

"We will not be stampeded into an agreement until its provisions are right. We will not be deflected from an agreement when its provisions are right."¹

"...the Agreement is not an ideal one, but it is the best possible one that can be obtained under present circumstances, and...these circumstances require a settlement now."²

To conclude America's involvement in the war in Vietnam, President Nixon attempted to implement a plan which would allow the United States to withdraw from the conflict without jeopardizing the security of the Saigon government. Over the course of Nixon's first administration, the success of the President's strategy depended on his ability to control American human (and, to a lesser extent, material) costs of the war during the time it would take to negotiate a settlement with the North Vietnamese. Earlier pages noted that for domestic political reasons, the President sought to

¹ News conference statement by Henry A. Kissinger, October 26, 1972. Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, published weekly), October 30, 1972, p. 1568 (hereafter referred to as Presidential Documents.)

² Secret letter from Richard Nixon to South Vietnamese President Nguyen Van Thieu dated January 17, 1973. Contained in Nguyen Tien Hung and Jerrold L. Schecter, The Palace File (New York: Harper and Row, 1986), pp. 393-395.

keep the costs of the war within limits that the public would tolerate in three ways: by reducing the numbers of American combat casualties through gradual troop withdrawals; by strengthening America's will to accept what fighting did continue through demonstrating serious efforts to negotiate a settlement and steady progress in Vietnamization; and by devaluing the objectives for which the U.S. fought, both through diminishing the importance of their achievement and by lowering the criteria against which their accomplishment would be measured.

The previous chapter addressed the administration's attention to the first two means of controlling costs. The present chapter considers the last of these measures---devaluation of the war objectives---and suggests that the decision to accept formal terms of settlement reveals the extent to which a nation fulfills its war aims. In the case of Vietnam, the United States settled for substantially devalued war objectives when it became apparent that these objectives could not be achieved in full form at a price the American people were willing to support.

With the Presidential election year of 1972 approaching, domestic dissatisfaction in the United States had grown to such a level that the President's very authority to conduct the war fell subject to increasingly serious challenge. The administration's support in Congress strained to maintain its toehold on victory in the ever more frequent votes on funding

for the war, and public tolerance for extended U.S. involvement in the region, on almost any basis, had reached its limits. Many administration officials believed that if Nixon were to have any real hope at re-election, the war simply had to end as soon as possible. Though Nixon's campaign promises of 1968 to end the war threatened a hollow resonance as his first term drew to a close, the President still insisted that the end of the war leave the U.S. with some portion of its objectives achieved.³

³ During his first presidential campaign during the New Hampshire primary, Nixon addressed the issue of ending the war on March 5, 1968, when he declared that if the war were not over by the November 1968 election the American people would "be justified to elect new leadership..." When pressed for details on his plan to end the war, however, Nixon refused, telling reporters that "no one with responsibility who is seeking office should give away any of his bargaining positions in advance...I am not going to take any positions that I would be bound by at a later point...[o]ne of the advantages of a new President is that he can start fresh without being imprisoned by the formulas of the past." Robert B. Semple, Jr. "Nixon Vows to End War With A 'New Leadership,'" New York Times, March 6, 1968, pp. 1, 32. See also "Nixon's War Policy Asked By Humphrey," New York Times, March 9, 1968, p. 16; and "Excerpts From the Transcript of a News Conference by Nixon on Foreign and Domestic Issues," New York Times, August 7, 1968, p. 28.

The lack of specifics notwithstanding, Nixon made it clear that he intended to bring the war to an end within a single Presidential term. After securing the Republican Party nomination, Nixon campaigned vigorously against the Johnson administration's handling of the war. Besieged by war protestors and hecklers during a campaign stop on October 9 in Santa Monica, California. Nixon shouted down their protests, proclaiming: "Those who have had a chance for four years and could not produce peace should not be given another chance." E.W. Kenworthy, "Nixon Would Outlaw Lewd Mail to Young," New York Times, October 10, 1968, pp. 1, 50.

During the years of the first Nixon administration, officials realized that achievement of the original war aims was impossible given increased public antipathy to the war. Consequently, as the official and secret negotiating sessions progressed, the United States softened or withdrew demands, gave generous interpretation to offers by Hanoi, and worked toward a general and deliberately ambiguous agreement. Indeed, so earnest was the administration to find a settlement that Henry Kissinger continually pressed Hanoi to separate the military aspects of the conflict (i.e. the timing of a cease-fire, withdrawal of American and allied troops, exchange of prisoners, etc.) from the political questions, leaving the latter---the very basis of the war to begin with---for the Vietnamese to settle among themselves. These moves revealed the administration's willingness to settle for quite a bit less than originally hoped for, simply in order to terminate America's involvement in Indochina.

The 'containment' argument which had provided much of the official justification explaining U.S. presence in Vietnam over the course of three administrations was largely abandoned by the Nixon White House because a more differentiated and sophisticated understanding of Communism had developed both within and outside government over the years of the war. But this objective also slipped quietly from the administration's list of imperatives as the recognition dawned on senior policy makers that it would

require the decisive military defeat of North Vietnam, and this simply could not be achieved at a cost that the American people would accept. Moreover, in the wake of Nixon's historic trips to both the People's Republic of China and the Soviet Union in 1972, it became almost impossible to claim that the war was necessary to halt the spread of the Communism while the President of the United States exchanged toasts with the leaders of the Communist world.

Another central objective of the United States was safeguarding the security and sovereignty of the South Vietnamese government. But by the time the United States was prepared to sign a formal treaty of peace with Hanoi, however, the administration had dramatically scaled down its expectations for its South Vietnamese ally from guaranteed security and sovereignty to simply providing Saigon the means for a fighting chance to survive on its own. The change in the U.S. negotiating position on the status of North Vietnamese troops in South Vietnam offers the starkest evidence of this modulation. Whereas in 1969, Nixon was insisting that the security of South Vietnam required the withdrawal of all 'non-South Vietnamese forces' from that country, by the end of his first term, mutual withdrawal was no longer seen as essential. Domestic politics in the United States provided some motivation for the change in the U.S. position on this issue.

As the 1972 Presidential campaign season got underway in the United States, few, if any, in the administration thought

that the American people would support the effort it would take to provide an absolute guarantee for the security of South Vietnam. Indeed, the criteria for evaluating just how secure South Vietnam really was, or needed to be, remained ambiguous even to those most closely associated with policy making. The administration capitalized on that ambiguity, and the standards by which officials judged the security of South Vietnam underwent gradual and subtle reformulation to conform with what they, by 1972, believed the U.S. could realistically hope to achieve, given the failure to secure either a decisive military victory on the battlefield or meaningful progress at the negotiating table. And what they envisaged was a South Vietnam simply strong 'enough' to hold its own against North Vietnamese attack.

Structural/systemic explanations do not offer a satisfactory account of U.S. behavior. Neither the battlefield situation or the state of the Paris negotiations demanded that the U.S. scale back its objectives. Nor, for that matter, were there conspicuously stronger international pressures during this period to compel the nation to settle. While it is true that the United States had thus far been unable to impose its terms of settlement on Hanoi, the reverse was equally true; despite receiving continuous, and apparently indefinite, support by China and the Soviet Union, North Vietnam had reached only stalemate on the battlefield. In late 1972, early 1973, there was no military imperative to

settle the war. Nor did the United States experience markedly different international pressure to end the war than it had experienced over the course of the past seven years (the international outcry over the Christmas bombing notwithstanding).

With the United States subject only to weak structural inducements to conclude a peace, we must turn elsewhere for an explanation of its policy direction in these closing years of the war. The Nixon administration accepted terms of settlement, and concluded U.S. involvement in the war in Vietnam because of the overriding domestic pressures which the President simply could no longer effectively contain. And to settle, the White House accepted terms which were strikingly different from those which the United States sought at the outset of formal negotiations which had begun in Paris in 1968, or that President Nixon identified in the early months of his administration in 1969.

The President and his advisers modified U.S. war objectives because of the high, and ultimately unacceptable, domestic political price they anticipated would have to be paid for continued involvement in Vietnam. The administration confronted a Congress on the verge of completely withholding funds for the war, a society simply no longer willing to carry on the fight, and prospects of a renewed, if less potent, Communist offensive the following spring (1973) which threatened to delay America's departure from the region even longer. The point of exit was clearly at hand.

Even after the overwhelming re-election of Richard Nixon in November 1972, the occasion to reconsider settling the war at this point simply never presented itself. With a 'secure and stable Saigon' as its goal, the American leadership judged Saigon secure not as against the threat of its enemy, but on the basis of its present military capability and the estimated strength of the Thieu government relative to other South Vietnamese alternatives. In other words, South Vietnam was far better prepared, in 1972, to defend itself than it had been in earlier years. And this was as good a time as the United States would have to leave the war. Domestic intolerance for the war had so severely circumscribed the President's policy discretion regarding Vietnam that nearly everyone in the administration believed that the proposed terms before them represented the best possible settlement under the circumstances. Over the next ninety days, the possible became the immutable. In January 1973, the United States formally agreed to leave Vietnam and in making that agreement, pronounced its objectives achieved.

Turning Into the Home Stretch

The closing months of 1971 brought frustration to the White House in its search for an end the war in a way that would bring "just and lasting peace."⁴ The public negotiating

⁴ "Address to the Nation on the War in Vietnam," Public Papers of the President: Richard M. Nixon (Washington, D.C.:

sessions in Paris had degenerated into much theatrical posturing by all sides and many observers simply grew disinterested in their progress and lost hope that they might yield a settlement. The secret meetings between Kissinger and Le Duc Tho faired only slightly better, though as the year closed, these too had become sterile. In Vietnam, meanwhile, Vietnamization was proceeding, and as U.S. forces were replaced by South Vietnamese troops the reality set in that U.S. involvement in the war would be brought to an end "regardless of what [was happening] on the negotiating front."⁵

The negotiating front looked grim indeed. In October 1971, the U.S. had presented a written eight-point peace plan in conjunction with a request for a secret meeting between Kissinger and Tho which proposed that, in return for a North Vietnam's agreement to cease its hostilities against South Vietnam, the U.S. would withdraw the vast bulk of its forces from South Vietnam within seven months of an agreement. Additionally, the eight-point plan called for, among other things, the mutual exchange of POWs, the full participation of all political factions in South Vietnam in internationally supervised elections, and the resignation---one month prior

Government Printing Office, published annually), 1969, p. 909.

⁵ Public Papers: RMN, 1969, p. 1011.

to these elections---of South Vietnamese President Thieu and Vice President Huong. In the waning months of 1971, the United States attempted to explore this proposal in a secret meeting between Henry Kissinger and Le Duc Tho as a final effort to secure a settlement before the end of the year and before the Communists mounted an offensive the following spring (1972) as was widely anticipated by Washington.

In mid-November, after several meeting dates were offered and rejected by both sides, the United States refused Hanoi's proposal of a meeting between Kissinger and Xuan Thuy on the grounds that Xuan simply was not empowered to negotiate at a serious level. The administration counter-proposed a meeting with a more significant North Vietnamese representative in order that the talks might bear fruit. Hanoi failed to respond to both the eight-point proposal and the American request for a meeting, and the talks were effectively suspended.

The domestic reaction to this latest stall in events was predictably adverse, and the administration came under fire for the lack of progress in the talks.⁶ Unable to obtain the slightest accommodation by the North Vietnamese and frustrated at Hanoi's manipulation of the public events which resulted in the U.S. being portrayed as the recalcitrant

⁶ See, for example, "Mr. Nixon's Vietnam Strategy," New York Times editorial, November 17, 1971, p. 46.

party, Nixon went public with the secret talks in a nationally-televised address on January 25, 1972.⁷

In his speech, though the President claimed widespread success for Vietnamization, he acknowledged that progress in the effort to negotiate a settlement had been 'disappointing.' It was, in fact, this disappointment that prompted the President's address that evening. In a shocking announcement, Nixon revealed that Henry Kissinger had been meeting secretly with North Vietnamese representatives for two and a half years and that it was these clandestine meetings, and not the public sessions, which represented the United States' most serious effort to arrive at a negotiated settlement. Nixon explained that he had initiated the private contacts because "both sides [could] be more flexible in offering new approaches...free from the pressure of public debate."⁸

The President went into some details of the thirty-month secret effort hoping to establish clearly that it was Hanoi, and not the United States or South Vietnam, that stood in the way of peace. The President also made public the plan which the United States had offered the previous October with one

⁷ "Address to the Nation Making Public a Plan for Peace in Vietnam," Public Papers: RMN, 1972, pp. 100-106.

⁸ January 25, 1972, Public Papers: RMN, 1972, p. 101.

nearly imperceptible difference: the time frame for U.S. troop withdrawal was reduced from seven to six months.⁹

Nixon's speech, combined with Kissinger's news conference the following day, attempted to make plain the fact that an agreement leading to the end of United States involvement was clearly within reach but for Hanoi's insistence that the political future of South Vietnam be settled first.¹⁰ Aside from rejecting the U.S. offer to settle the military aspects of the conflict separately from the political issues, North Vietnam demanded that the United States completely withdraw its support for the Saigon government. The White House interpreted this as a demand that the United States "overthrow the Government of South Vietnam" and "join our enemy to overthrow our ally."¹¹ But even as the administration refused complicity in the overthrow of Thieu, Nixon's January 25 speech also initiated a subtle retreat from the official position that the United States would be the guarantor of South Vietnam's sovereignty:

⁹ January 25, 1972, Public Papers: RMN, 1972, p. 103.

¹⁰ Robert B. Semple, Jr., "President's Adviser Asks Public to Back Initiatives," New York Times, January 27, 1972, pp. 1, 15; and John L. Hess, "Hanoi and Vietcong Decry Nixon's Peace Proposals; Kissinger Explains Goals," New York Times, January 27, 1972, pp. 1, 15. A chronology of the public and secret peace initiatives of the United States appears in this same edition of the New York Times on p. 27.

¹¹ January 25, 1972, Public Papers: RMN, 1972, pp. 102, 104.

"If the enemy rejects our offer to negotiate, we shall continue our program of ending American involvement in the war by withdrawing our remaining forces as the South Vietnamese develop the capability to defend themselves. If the enemy's answer to our peace offer is to step up their military attacks, I shall fully meet my responsibility as Commander in Chief of our Armed Forces to protect our remaining troops."¹²

This pronouncement, combined with the offer for a unilateral withdrawal of American troops (in exchange for an Indochina-wide cease fire and mutual return of prisoners), represented the first public departure from previous U.S. positions which had insisted on the withdrawal of "all non-South Vietnamese forces" from South Vietnam and the commitment that the United States "would take whatever military steps necessary" to support the South Vietnamese against Communist attacks. Privately, the U.S. had begun to back away from these positions as early as May 1971, when Henry Kissinger presented a secret proposal to the North Vietnamese which omitted, for the first time, the demand for a mutual withdrawal. As a further concession, also made in May 1971, Kissinger proposed for the first time a set schedule for the complete withdrawal of American forces from Vietnam.¹³

¹² January 25, 1972, Public Papers: RMN, 1972, p. 104, emphasis added.

¹³ Kissinger discusses the proposals of the May 31 secret meeting in White House Years, pp. 1018n.

Having dropped its demand for a mutual withdrawal of forces as a condition of settlement, the United States sharply recast its objective of a secure and stable South Vietnam. A comparison of official statements between 1969 and 1972 clearly reveal the radical change in the United States' interpretation of this objective. In his first major address to the nation on Vietnam on May 14, 1969, Nixon observed:

What kind of settlement will permit the South Vietnamese people to determine freely their own political future? Such a settlement will require the withdrawal of all non-South Vietnamese forces, including our own, from South Vietnam, and procedures for political choice that give each significant group in South Vietnam a real opportunity to participate in the political life of the nation...I affirm our willingness to withdraw our forces on a specified timetable. We ask only that North Vietnam withdraw its forces from South Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos into North Vietnam, also within a timetable.¹⁴

¹⁴ "Address to the Nation on Vietnam," May 14, 1969, Public Papers: RMN, 1969, p. 372. By April 7, 1971, the President was giving indications that other imperatives had begun to modify the goal of a South Vietnam free to determine its own political future:

Our goal is a total American withdrawal from Vietnam. We can and we will reach that goal through our program of Vietnamization if necessary. But we would infinitely prefer to reach it even sooner---through negotiations...The issue is very simply this: Shall we leave Vietnam in a way that---by our own actions---consciously turns the country over to the Communists? Or shall we leave in a way that gives the South Vietnamese a reasonable chance to survive as a free people? My plan will end American involvement in a way that would provide that chance.

Compare this to the text of the President's January 25, 1972 address:

Because some parts of this agreement [proposed here] could prove more difficult to negotiate than others, we would be willing...as we proposed last May [1971]... to settle only the military issues and leave the political issues to the Vietnamese alone. Under this approach, we would withdraw all U.S. and allied forces within 6 months in exchange for an Indochina cease-fire and the release of all prisoners. The choice is up to the enemy.¹⁵

Nixon not only publicly vacated the U.S. position on a mutual withdrawal, he also offered to forfeit U.S. participation in the settlement of the contentious political issues which precipitated the conflict.¹⁶

("Address to the Nation on the Situation in Southeast Asia," April 7, 1971, Public Papers: RMN, 1971, pp. 523, 524-5.)

15 "Address to the Nation Making Public a Plan for Peace in Vietnam," January 25, 1972, Public Papers: RMN, 1972, p. 104.

16 This move would have unintended, but bitterly ironic, consequences. Characteristic of nearly every U.S. peace proposal offered in the Nixon years was the provision to allow the political participation of "each significant group in South Vietnam...in the political life of the nation." In so doing, the U.S. acknowledged the significance and political strength of the NLF; something which that group had sought, but the Thieu regime, understandably, had vigorously denied. As U.S. military support began to ebb, Thieu's intransigence on (among other things) negotiating with the NLF, cast him in the role of spoiler and only accelerated and intensified U.S. Congress opposition to further funding for South Vietnam. The irony is complete because the U.S. strongly resisted Hanoi's persistent demand that Thieu be ousted before settlement could be reached. The U.S. opposed this, in part, because many American officials were privately convinced that Thieu represented the only South Vietnamese leader sufficiently strong to maintain political power long

Though the President's speech went far toward allaying domestic grumblings (coming as it did on the heels of yet another troop withdrawal announcement), it failed to motivate the North Vietnamese to resume serious negotiations. In February, with the talks still at an impasse, Nixon undertook a spectacular trip to the People's Republic of China.¹⁷

In discussions with Chinese leaders, the White House hoped to capitalize on their desires for improved relations with the United States and persuade them to pressure their North Vietnamese ally to resume the Paris discussion and work toward a peace settlement with the United States. Nixon failed to move either Mao Zedong or Zhou Enlai on this issue, however, though the Chinese leaders clearly indicated that the war in Vietnam did not represent a serious obstacle to efforts to improve relations between their country and the United States.¹⁸

enough for the United States to complete its withdrawal from the conflict.

¹⁷ On the President's trip, which took place February 17-28, 1972, see "Richard Nixon's Long March to Shanghai," Time, March 6, 1972, pp. 10-23. See also Nixon, RN: Memoirs, pp. 522-25, 544-80; Kissinger, White House Years, pp. 1049-1096; Marvin Kalb and Bernard Kalb, Kissinger (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1974), pp. 266-83. Official Statements and chronology of the President's activities in China can be found in Public Papers: RMN, 1972, pp. 365-84.

¹⁸ The joint communique issued upon the completion of Nixon's trip, with its oblique reference to the Vietnam conflict appears in Public Papers: RMN, 1972, pp. 376-379.

Throughout the early months of 1972 North Vietnam remained unresponsive to all efforts to restart the stalled negotiations between Kissinger and Tho. Finally on March 23, 1972, the United States walked out of the plenary sessions, which had yielded nothing of any substance, until such time as North Vietnam indicated its willingness to participate seriously. Administration officials attributed the extended North Vietnamese rebuff to Hanoi's belief that the domestic divisions within the United States might prove a valuable asset, particularly in the early months of an American Presidential election year, and help to force a nervous President Nixon to take the final steps toward a complete U.S. retreat from Vietnam.¹⁹

Extensive secret intelligence also helped to convince a number of Presidential advisers that the North Vietnamese were planning one final military gambit in an effort to

¹⁹ Hanoi's understanding of the American polity, and its attempt to use that understanding in the Paris negotiations underscores the importance and role of each belligerent's view and impression of the other in conflict and efforts to terminate that conflict. The North Vietnamese clearly held a perception that the United States President could be manipulated through American public opinion and political opposition in Congress; Lyndon Johnson's decision not to seek re-election in 1968 no doubt fueled this belief. Perceiving that Nixon was similarly vulnerable to domestic political pressures, the Communist delegation in Paris repeatedly attempted to capitalize on anti-war protests in the United States to induce concessions from the Americans. Kissinger recalls more than one occasion in the secret negotiating sessions when the North Vietnamese marshalled evidence of U.S. domestic strife to their cause. See Kissinger, White House Years, pp. 1019, 1170.

secure control over as much South Vietnamese territory and population as possible before it acceded to a settlement.²⁰ Though these same experts were convinced that such a military move revealed Hanoi's belief that the conflict was in its final throes, few held any misapprehensions regarding the ability of the South Vietnamese military to withstand a concerted conventional assault.²¹ The results of a successful Communist offensive could be disastrous and cause the war---and U.S. military presence in Indochina---to extend months or even years to undo the damage. In early spring 1972, the worst fears of these pessimistic administration officials were confirmed.

On March 30, 1972, Easter Sunday, North Vietnam launched a massive conventional offensive across the demilitarized zone. Communist troops pour across the border, and initial developments did not bode well for the South Vietnamese. South Vietnam's northernmost province, Quang Tri, fell early to the Communist advance, and the American media was awash with scenes of ARVN units in disarray beating a hasty retreat

²⁰ One participant in the secret negotiations reportedly observed: "...their attacks meant that the NVA was going largely for territory that, because it could not be held permanently...could later be given up as concession if we got to bargaining over a cease-fire line." (Cited in Allan E. Goodman, The Lost Peace, Stanford California: Hoover Institution Press, 1978, pp. 117-8.)

²¹ Unable to divest itself of ruinous corruption and paralyzing inefficiency, the ARVN, though swollen in numbers, remained far from a credible force capable of national defense.

south along Route 1 amidst a tide of refugees. One report observed starkly that "[b]y all accounts, the pell-mell retreat of the Army of South Vietnam from its northern defense lines last week constitute a classic rout." ²² So dire did the situation appear that on the first of April the White House secretly authorized extensive air and naval strikes on North Vietnam. The President announced this action to the nation in a televised speech on April 26, 1972.²³

In addition to detailing the extent of the North Vietnamese invasion, the President repeated the offer of peace terms which he had made public in January. But while he decried the fact that Hanoi had, in effect, responded to his proposal by committing over 120,000 North Vietnamese regulars to an assault on South Vietnam, Nixon announced, remarkably, that over the course of the next two months, an additional twenty thousand American soldiers would be withdrawn from Vietnam; progress in Vietnamization, the President declared, had made

²² "Another Ordeal Looms for Hue," Newsweek, May 15, 1972, pp. 22-23. See also, "Vietnam: The Specter of Defeat," Newsweek, May 15, 1972, pp. 20-22; "Escalation in the Air, Ordeal on the Ground," Time, April 24, 1972, pp. 26-28. "The Fierce War on the Ground," Time, May 1, 1972, pp. 16-18; "South Vietnam in the Balance," U.S. News and World Report, May 15, 1972, pp. 21-23, and "The Ground War Grinds On--- South Vietnam's Prospects Now," U.S. News and World Report, May 22, 1972, pp. 19-20.

²³ Public Papers: RMN, 1972, pp. 550-4.

this move possible.²⁴ But Nixon also vowed that as long as the Communist's persisted in their aggression, U.S. planes and warships would continue to carry out air and naval strikes against the territory of North Vietnam. This action was necessary, Nixon said, for three reasons: "...first, to protect our remaining American forces; second, to permit continuation of our withdrawal program; and third, to prevent the imposition of a Communist regime on the people of South Vietnam against their will..."²⁵

The President's actions, though obviously directed against the North Vietnamese, were taken with a full consideration of the impact they would doubtless have on plans for the upcoming U.S.-Soviet summit scheduled for May. To Nixon's mind, the Communist offensive itself demanded a strong military response, but his assessment that the Soviets would view the United States as pathetically weak if it failed to aid its besieged ally counseled tough action as well. The

²⁴ Public Papers: RMN, 1972, p. 552.

²⁵ Public Papers: RMN, 1972, p. 553. The language of this official justification and the ranking of rationales support the argument here that the President had scaled down the criteria for achieving the security and sovereignty of South Vietnam. From this point on, official justification for significant decisions regarding additional U.S. military pressure in the region were cast in terms of defending the remaining U.S. troops in Vietnam in order to continue the reduction of American involvement in the region. The security of South Vietnam assumed a decidedly minor role in administration efforts to mollify the American public outrage at the decision to bomb Hanoi, as well as months later, when the President authorized the so-called 'Christmas Bombing.'

President walked a fine line: decisive action in Vietnam was needed to stop the Communist advance and would impress the Soviets that the United States was indeed powerful and resolute, yet the massive bombardment threatened to provoke the Soviets to cancel the summit, thereby further intensifying domestic criticism of the President's actions.²⁶

In late April Kissinger traveled secretly to Moscow for a pre-summit visit and came away convinced that the Soviets did not view the American military response to Hanoi's offensive as a serious impediment to the planned meeting between Nixon and Brezhnev.²⁷ In the wake of what was thought to be Soviet pressure on Hanoi to resume meaningful talks, Kissinger again met secretly with representatives from Hanoi on May 2, but to little purpose. Nixon's frustration at the lack of progress in negotiations combined with unsettling reports of imminent Communist victories in the major central and southern cities of Kontum and An Loc was complete. On May 8, the President

²⁶ The flavor of the press coverage of the President's policies---"A Strategy of Failure"---can be had from the editorial pages of the New York Times, April 19, 1972. See also, "Vietnamization: A Policy Under the Gun," Time, April 17, 1972, pp. 30-40; "The President Battles on Three Fronts," Time, May 1, 1972, pp. 11-16; "What Went Wrong in Vietnam: The Fallacies in U.S. Policy," Newsweek, May 15, 1972, pp. 24-25; and "Showdown Over Vietnam," U.S. News and World Report, May 22, 1972, pp. 16-7.

²⁷ See the discussion of Kissinger's trip (taken between April 20-24) in Kalb and Kalb, Kissinger, pp. 291-6. See also Kissinger's response to relevant questions in his news conference of May 9, 1972 in Presidential Documents, May 15, 1972, pp. 842-5.

publicly announced that he had authorized large scale bombing of military targets throughout North Vietnam, including Hanoi, and had further ordered the mining of Haiphong Harbor and the active interdiction of rail and communications lines.²⁸

Criticism was swift and vehement. Despite the President's offer in this same May 8 speech that the United States would completely withdraw its troops from South Vietnam within four months of an Indochina-wide cease-fire and the return of all POWs, and his intentional silence on the issues of a political settlement and the withdrawal of North Vietnamese

28 In his May 8 address, the President said that Hanoi's persistent aggression and refusal to negotiate seriously gave the United States little choice but the course he was pursuing. The President outlined a three-pronged plan: the mining of all entrances to North Vietnamese ports, including the main port of Haiphong; the severance of North Vietnam's rail and communications lines and the continuance and intensification of air and naval strikes against military targets in North Vietnam. "Address to the Nation on the Situation in Southeast Asia," May 8, 1972, Public Papers: RMN, 1972, pp. 583-587.

Observing that "domestic support was for us an essential part of the effectiveness of any military measure," Kissinger provides some background to this decision in White House Years, pp. 1165-1201. In the discussion surrounding whether the United States should pre-emptively cancel the summit and avoid the embarrassment of the Soviets taking the lead, Kissinger recalls that John Connally, Secretary of the Treasury and respected adviser to the President, urged no such action, recommending instead that decisive measures be addressed specifically to the military dilemma at hand.

Kissinger pragmatically pointed out that the political demands of the situation were at least as important as the military imperatives when he responded that the United States "...needed a military step that would at once shock Hanoi sufficiently...and be sustainable in terms of American public opinion." (White House Years, p. 1178).

troops from South Vietnam, Nixon was accused of unnecessarily aggravating the situation. Some argued that his failure to order a complete immediate withdrawal of American troops only served to intensify the war. This feeling, in turn, led to a growing sensation of betrayal among many observers, who castigated the Administration for leading the American people to believe that it sought only to end the conflict.²⁹ The President received further criticism for jeopardizing the superpower summit, now only weeks away. Within the administration too, a number of officials fully believed that

²⁹ See, for example, "The War on Two Fronts," Newsweek, May 1, 1972, pp. 22-23, and "The Miscalculation Is Mutual," Newsweek, May 1, 1972, pp. 49-52; "Anti-war Protests: Lower Key than 1970 But More to Come," U.S. News and World Report, May 8, 1972, pp. 106-7; and "Nixon at Brink Over Vietnam," Time, May 22, 1972, pp. 11-15. See also Robert B. Semple, Jr., "Nixon Orders Enemy's Ports Mined; Speaks to Nation," New York Times, May 9, 1972, pp. 1, 18; John W. Finney, "Congress is Split on Nixon's Action," New York Times, May 9, 1972, pp. 1, 19; Carroll Kilpatrick, "Nixon Vows Pullout Four Months After Truce, POW Return," Washington Post, May 9, 1972, pp. 1, A15; David S. Broder, "Politics: President Stakes His Re-election on Riskiest Decision of the War," Washington Post, May 9, 1972, pp. 1, A14; Michael Getler, "Military: U.S. Believes It's Not Too Late to Prevent South From Falling," Washington Post, May 9, 1972, pp. 1, A14; John L. Hess, "President's Course is Termed 'Challenge to Entire World'," New York Times, May 10, 1972, pp. 1, 20; John Dainton, "Antiwar Protests Erupt Across U.S.," New York Times, May 10, 1972, p. 22; John W. Finney, "Democratic Caucus in the Senate Condemns the 'Escalation' in Vietnam," New York Times, May 10, 1972, p. 19; Linda Charlton, "Antiwar Protests Rise Here and Across Country," New York Times, May 11, 1972, pp. 1, 16; and Spencer Rich and Richard L. Lyons, "Senate Backs Nixon on Cease-Fire, 47-43--- Mansfield Presses Alternative," Washington Post, May 17, 1972, pp. 1, A7.

the Soviets could not stand idle in the face of this latest military action of the United States and would cancel.³⁰

The President himself was already decided that he simply could not go to Moscow if the North Vietnamese assault, armed and outfitted by the Soviet Union, did not shortly wane.³¹ Nixon appealed directly to the Soviets in his address saying: "We...are on the threshold of a new relationship that can serve not only the interests of our two countries but the cause of world peace. We are prepared to continue to build up this relationship. The responsibility is yours if we fail."³² Apparently the Soviets were more convinced of the

30 Hal Sonnenfeldt, Kissinger's Soviet expert, was particularly convinced this would happen, see Kissinger, White House Years, p. 1182. See also Murrey Marder, "Impact: Nixon Gambling Arms Talks, Summit and Decade of Defense," Washington Post, May 9, 1972, pp. 1, A14; Robert B. Semple, Jr., "President Took a Week to Reach His Vietnam Decision," New York Times, May 10, 1972, pp. 1, 19; Murrey Marder, "U.S. Believes First Crisis Past," Washington Post, May 12, 1972, pp. 1, A21; Bernard Gwertzman, "Kissinger Discusses Threat to Relations With Russians," New York Times, May 10, 1972, pp. 1, 18; and "Mr. Nixon's Brinksmanship," New York Times editorial, May 10, 1972, p. 46. For an interesting discussion of the desirability of the summit from the Soviets perspective see "The Cautious Climb to the Summit," Newsweek, May 1, 1972, pp. 37-8; Theodore Shabad, "Soviets Giving Rationale for Nixon Visit," New York Times, May 17, 1972, p. 15; and Robert Kaiser, "Soviets Have High Hopes for Success at Summit Meeting," Washington Post, May 18, 1972, pp. A25, A30.

31 "It was hard to see how I could go to the summit and be clinking glasses with Brezhnev while Soviet tanks were rumbling through Hue or Quangtri." Nixon, RN: Memoirs, p. 601.

32 Public Papers: RMN, 1972, p. 586.

President's words than were the American people, and the summit went on as planned.³³ A number of important bilateral agreements were concluded during the trip, and the Soviet's muted criticism of the U.S. bombing and mining of North Vietnam betrayed their estimate of its importance.³⁴

By the end of June, the military fortunes of the South Vietnamese had markedly improved and the early Communist victories were, for the most part, reversed. Fighting with a renewed sense of purpose, the South Vietnamese acquitted their earlier performance,³⁵ but the intensive U.S. aerial bombardment campaign bore no small responsibility for the turn around in events. Since April, major industrial targets in the North were subjected to the most intense bombing yet seen in the war. Hanoi and Haiphong Harbor bore the greatest brunt of the attacks, and criticism of the U.S. action grew as reports surfaced that large numbers of non-combatant civilians were being killed in what many viewed as an

33 A number of treatments detailing Nixon's historic trip to the Soviet Union exist. Among them are of course Nixon's own, and Kissinger's chapter 28 in White House Years. See also, "Adding Up the Summit," Time, June 5, 1972, pp. 13-19; "The Moscow Summit," Newsweek, May 29, 1972, pp. 34-49; and "After the Moscow Primary," Newsweek, June 12, 1972, pp. 20-22.

34 "From Russia With Hope," Newsweek, June 5, 1972, pp. 26-32.

35 See, for example, "South Viet Nam: Pulling Itself Together," Time, May 22, 1972, pp. 15-17; and "A New Bombing Clout," Newsweek, June 5, 1972, p. 53;

indiscriminate rain of shells.³⁶ Though the President's policy of Vietnamization and gradual troop withdrawals, coupled with his diplomatic successes in China and the Soviet Union, had brought relative calm to anti-war activity in the United States, the incessant bombing, and the initial flurry of political activity surrounding the Democratic and Republican national conventions revived those passions.

On July 13, 1972, George McGovern accepted the Democratic Presidential nomination and immediately focused on the end of the Vietnam war as the principal issue of his campaign. Though he did not give the specifics of his plan to end the war, he did vow to "halt the senseless bombing...on Inauguration Day."³⁷ Nixon accepted the re-nomination of his party on August 23 and spoke of the progress his administration had made in winding down the war:

We have brought over half a million men home and more will be coming home. We have ended America's ground combat role. No draftees are being sent to Vietnam. We have reduced our casualties by 98

³⁶ Continuing through the summer, the bombardment appeared to many a gross misapplication of U.S. military superiority. The inadvertent destruction of the French diplomatic mission in Hanoi in mid-October, killing the French Delegate-General Pierre Suisini, brought the outrage to a full boil. By this time, however, the rapidly approaching Presidential election and the pre-occupation of members of Congress with their own political fortunes had diverted much of the national attention away from the details of the war.

³⁷ Max Frankel, "McGovern Names Eagleton Running Mate; Asserts Nixon is the 'Fundamental Issue'," New York Times, July 14, 1972, pp. 1, 11. It was not until October 10, 1972, that McGovern outlined his program for ending the conflict. See note 59 below.

percent. We have gone the extra mile, in fact, we have gone tens of thousands of miles trying to seek a negotiated settlement of the war. We have offered a cease-fire, a total withdrawal of all American forces, an exchange of all prisoners of war, internationally supervised free elections with the Communists participating in the elections and in the supervision.³⁸

Nixon's lines reveal more than the impassioned rhetoric of a presidential hopeful. His words truthfully describe the actions taken by his administration in an effort to end the war; but these actions, essentially without exception, were motivated by the President's desire to accommodate domestic pressures and were not demanded by either the battlefield situation or the state of play in the Paris negotiations. The administration's entire program to end the war reflected its efforts to contain war costs within levels that the American people could accept in order to salvage some of the objectives of the war without placing the President in political jeopardy.

The majority of Americans had lost sight of just what those objectives were, however. Nixon had restricted his acceptance remarks to the observation that the United States would not assist the North Vietnamese in "imposing a Communist government" on the people of South Vietnam. Most people did not believe that the United States should do otherwise, and the President's words held little meaning. The question for most informed observers had long been, how

³⁸ Presidential Documents, August 28, 1972, pp. 1267-70.

far the United States would go to prevent Hanoi from exercising its aggressive designs on Saigon. And on this issue, the administration set South Vietnam's ability to defend itself as the point at which the United States could comfortably depart Vietnam. The means and standards for assessing this ability remained deliberately unstated, however---an ambiguity which the administration would find useful in the months ahead.

During this campaign summer, there was no shortage of Congressional efforts to legislate an end to the conflict. The Senate considered a number of actions based on a formulation proposed by Senator Edward W. Brooke (R-Massachusetts) that called for the withdrawal of all U.S. ground, air, and naval forces from Indochina within four months of its enactment, contingent only upon the release of all American POWs held in the region. Versions of this amendment were attached to a number of bills related to foreign aid, military procurement, and military assistance, and though approved twice, fell to a 42-45 defeat in a final Senate vote on September 26, 1972. The House had been consistently less inclined to legislate an end to the war and defeated a parallel amendment which called for the United States to effect a complete military withdrawal from Indochina by October 1, 1972 on August 10 in a 178-228 vote.³⁹

³⁹ U.S. Senate, 92d Congress, 1st session, "Senate Foreign Relations Committee History," Legislative History of the

Also adopted in the Senate were several reconstructed versions of the Mansfield Amendment of 1971 which called for the establishment of a definite deadline for the complete withdrawal of American troops.⁴⁰ Again, the House failed to

Committee on Foreign Relations January 21, 1971 through October 18, 1972 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1973), pp. 57-66.

40 The Mansfield Amendment reads, in part:

The Congress hereby urges and requests the President to implement the above expressed policy by initiating immediately the following action:

(1) Negotiate with the Government of North Vietnam for an immediate cease-fire by all parties to the hostilities in Indochina.

(2) Negotiate with the Government of North Vietnam for the establishing of a final date for the withdrawal from Indochina of all military forces of the United States contingent upon the release at a date certain of all American prisoners of war held by the Government of North Vietnam and forces allied with such Government.

(3) Negotiate with the Government of North Vietnam for an agreement which would provide for a series of phased and rapid withdrawals of United States military forces from Indochina subject to a corresponding series of phased releases of American prisoners of war concurrently with the withdrawal of all remaining military forces of the United States by not later than the date established pursuant to paragraph (2) hereof.

(Title IV: Termination of Hostilities in Indochina, Section 401, "An Act to Amend the Military Selective Service Act of 1967: Public Law 92-129, Approved September 28, 1971" [House Resolution 6531], September 28, 1971, pp. 13-14.)

Though this amendment was not binding on Presidential actions, it did form the basis for a number of Senate efforts to legislate an end to the war. By 1972, the provisions of this amendment, as well as those of the others it spawned,

sustain the Senate votes, in part because the President's efforts toward improving relations with the Soviet Union and China had generated a good deal of bipartisan support, and also because the steady rate at which American forces were already being withdrawn from Indochina drained the significance from the amendment's major provisions.

Despite Congress' inability to enact timely 'end-the war' legislation, frustration at the seemingly unending war fueled a growing dissatisfaction with the administration's war policies and prompted increasing calls for more control over general Executive discretion in foreign affairs. As the election grew nearer, however, the President's critics in Congress failed either to crystallize and focus their complaints or marshal the emotion of their colleagues, and the President's authority in foreign affairs escaped circumscription, at least for the time being.⁴¹

had been largely overcome by events. The President's gradual reduction of U.S. troops on the ground in Asia and disclosures that the United States was willing to set a fixed date for the complete withdrawal of its forces in return for the exchange of POWs, sapped much of the power from the Senate formulations.

⁴¹ During 1973, Congress did pass the War Powers Resolution as an attempt to assert Congressional influence in foreign policy decisions requiring the use of American armed forces. The principal sponsors of this resolution were Jacob K. Javits (R-New York) and William B. Spong, Jr. (D-Virginia). A number of works consider the War Powers Resolution, and its surrounding debate, in some detail. Two of the most useful are W. Taylor Reveley, III, War Powers of the President and Congress (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1981), and Pat M. Holt, The War Powers

By September 1971, Nixon's lead over McGovern had grown substantial. Gallup polls indicated that the President held a commanding 34-point margin over his democratic challenger. McGovern's Vietnam war policies, yet to be clearly articulated, did not contribute so much to his trailing as did the general public discomfiture which followed McGovern's delayed and inept exchange of Thomas Eagleton for Sargent Shriver as his Vice-Presidential running mate, and the chief Democrat's proposal that every man, woman, and child in the United States receive one thousand dollars from the U.S. Treasury.⁴²

Though most Americans viewed Vietnam as an important issue of the campaign, clear signals regarding strategies for ending the war did not emerge. Sixty-two percent of the population had indicated that they believed the United States should withdraw all its troops from Vietnam by the end of the year, though only twenty-one percent believed that a settlement would be reached by that time. Nevertheless, fifty-eight percent believed that Nixon would handle the

Resolution: The Role of Congress in U.S. Armed Intervention (Washington, D.C.: American Enterprise Institute, 1978.)

⁴² Gallup Opinion Index 87 (September 1972), pp. 1-4. See also "Talk of a Record Landslide," U.S. News and World Report, November 6, 1972, pp. 25-27; Peter Goldman and Richard Stout, "McGovern's Politics of Righteousness," Newsweek, November 6, 1972, pp. 43-44; and "The Long Road to Disaster," Time, November 20, 1972, pp. 24-27.

Vietnam issue better than McGovern, despite mixed feelings regarding the bombing campaign.⁴³

By this time in the war, the only U.S. combat role was aerial and naval bombing support of South Vietnamese ground operations. American troops had not engaged in offensive ground maneuvers since the end of the Cambodian operation in 1971. Thus it is interesting to note that during these last months of the 1972 Presidential campaign, 45% of those polled disapproved of the bombing of North Vietnam (which had been going on continuously since April), while 40% approved.⁴⁴

This data, when cast against the strong preference people demonstrated for Nixon's general handling of the war, indicate that in the minds of many Americans, the issue of 'the war' had in fact become the issue of America's withdrawal, and no longer the actual fighting. The end of the war, or more precisely, the end of United States' involvement in the war, became for many the primary objective of the administration's war policies. Achieving the security of South Vietnam, preserving the Saigon government or containing of Communism did not provide the standards against which the public measured the President's success in dealing

⁴³ Gallup Opinion Index 86 (August 1972), p. 20; and Gallup Opinion Index 88 (October 1972), p. 8, 12.

⁴⁴ Gallup Opinion Index 88, (October 1972), p. 20. Fifteen percent had no opinion.

with the Vietnam War, but the President's progress in ending U.S. involvement did.

Knowing that the vast majority of American people were more concerned with bringing the war to an end than they were with salvaging any vestige of the original war aims, the White House nevertheless refused to order a sudden and total withdrawal of the remaining forces. A number of explanations account for the administration's rejection of this option. First, until mid-October 1972, the United States and Hanoi were simply no closer to agreement on settlement terms than they had been nearly since the time Nixon took office in 1969. A precipitous withdrawal at this point seemed absurd after three years of efforts to maintain a presence in the region until such time as South Vietnam was able to provide for its own defense.

Second, Nixon wanted concrete assurances that American POWs would be returned or accounted for; he simply did not rely on the Communist's good graces to ensure their return, and he believed that if the U.S. withdrew totally from South Vietnam, there would be no bargaining leverage for the prisoners' repatriation. Third, aside from the campaign rhetoric of McGovern, serious political pressure for immediate withdrawal had all but ceased with the defeat of the Brooke amendment in the Senate and its sister legislation in the House and the recess of Congress for the November election.

Finally, the President, now confident of a sweeping victory in November, believed that time still remained to press Hanoi for concessions. Furious activity on the secret negotiating front served to convince Nixon that a settlement was within grasp, and the prospects of overwhelming electoral victory erased the deadline of Election Day. The President focused, instead, on his Inauguration Day, following the convening of the new Congress, as the deadline by which he wanted a firm agreement in hand.⁴⁵

Kissinger later observed that it was pure mythology that Nixon "for domestic political reasons" urgently sought to end the war before the election.⁴⁶ He marshalls the developments in the 1972 campaign and the effects of three years of troop withdrawals, which relieved much of pressure on Nixon to deliver on his promise to end the war, as supporting evidence for his claim. But Nixon began his Presidency intent on finding a resolution to the war within his first four years in office. That desire was fueled, in part, by Nixon's early

⁴⁵ Indeed, as will be discussed below, the President came to oppose the announcement of a settlement in advance of the election because he feared it would both alienate right-wing supporters and appear as political pandering to the nation's doves on the eve of an election. The President was not unaware of the fact, however, that he did not have unlimited time to play out his expectations regarding an improved settlement with Hanoi. The White House clearly believed that despite the President's re-election, which seemed assured, the new Congress would move swiftly to legislate an end to the war as soon as it reconvened in January 1973.

⁴⁶ Kissinger, White House Years, p. 1308.

beliefs that he needed to bring the war to a close in order to guarantee himself re-election particularly since he had publicly criticized the Johnson administration during the 1968 campaign for its failure to do so. Privately, Nixon was convinced that the time available to him to wind the war down was limited. Two lines of an uncirculated campaign memo revealed the essential theme which Nixon sounded over and over again in that campaign: "...after [four] years of failure---it's time for new leadership to end the war..."⁴⁷

Though referring to Johnson, Nixon no doubt recalled his own words many times over during the course of his first term, especially in the early months of the 1972 campaign when his re-election was not yet assured. While McGovern's political mis-steps and extreme policies enhanced Nixon's lead as the election drew nearer, they only increased the margin which Nixon already enjoyed largely as a result of his foreign policy coups with the Soviet Union and China and because of the steady rate at which the United States was withdrawing from South Vietnam. Thus if Nixon did not feel pressured to conclude a settlement in advance of the election, he nevertheless did want a settlement before he began his second term, both because four years earlier he had promised to do so, and because he did not want this war tying

⁴⁷ Campaign Memo dated July 7, 1968. Nixon Papers. Hoover Institution Archives.

his hands any further as he undertook to expand on the inroads he had made during his first administration.

The White House spent the summer of 1972 publicly claiming to have been impressed by the performance of the ARVN during the Communist's Easter Offensive. Privately, however, many high-level civilian and military observers harbored serious reservations regarding both the actual military proficiency of the South Vietnamese and their capability to sustain any level of pitched combat. The United States needed to reach an agreement in Paris before the South Vietnamese forces were pushed beyond their capacity. With a renewed sense of urgency, Kissinger began another round of secret meetings with Le Duc Tho in Paris on July 19, 1972.

Kissinger came to this series of talks prepared to restate the position of the United States which the President had most recently outlined on May 8: The U.S. would withdraw its troops from Vietnam within four months of an agreement in exchange for a cease-fire in place, the resignation of South Vietnamese President Thieu in advance of national elections (the offer was now for Thieu's resignation two months prior), and the return and full accounting of all American POWs. Shortly before the talks resumed, Alexander Haig, one of the few White House officials who could claim Thieu's confidence, was dispatched to Saigon to brief the South Vietnamese President on the United States' strategy for the negotiations.

Haig found Thieu in no mood for compromise. Having seen his military forces withstand the worst of the Communist assault, Thieu believed there was little reason to offer concessions to Hanoi. A compromised settlement with North Vietnam would not permanently resolve the political differences between the two states, and violence would surely erupt again. To Thieu's mind, the only logical move at this point was to press for the total military defeat of North Vietnam.⁴⁸ Thieu's negative reaction to Haig's presentation revealed fundamental differences between the allies not only regarding the stakes in the war but also regarding the constraints under which each fought.

For the Vietnamese, the war was total. The political aims of the conflict had made it so. The objectives of the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong demanded the overthrow of the governmental forms existing in South Vietnam. There was no room for compromise; Hanoi's victory required Saigon's defeat, and Saigon's survival demanded that the Communist regime in Hanoi be destroyed. For all of the Vietnamese parties, the stakes could go no higher, and thus the only constraint on the war effort that made sense to them was the material capacity of each belligerent to wage war.

For the United States, however, the war was not total. Over the course of three administrations, the White House

⁴⁸ See the discussion in Hung and Schechter, The Palace File, pp. 64-5.

consistently maintained the position that neither the 'defeat' of Hanoi, nor the destruction of North Vietnam were objectives of the American combat effort. The U.S. fought to induce Hanoi to cease its aggression in the South and to support the Saigon government. Having cast the conflict as limited war, the administration could not devote unchecked resources to its cause. This fundamental difference in perspectives only dimly revealed itself to the American negotiating principles as the secret talks resumed in July. Kissinger later observed:

Going on to total victory seemed more sensible to Thieu and probably no more costly than the compromises now achievable. Unfortunately, that was not our choice. Even if Hanoi did not suddenly accept our proposals, the new Congress [to seat in January 1973] would force us to settle on worse terms---withdrawal for prisoners---than those we would seek to negotiate. It was understandable that Thieu would continue to demand victory, which would have required several years of further American as well as South Vietnamese exertion. But we had no margin at home for such a course. We would be lucky if we could obtain the terms Nixon had put forward on May 8 before the Congress voted us out of the war.⁴⁹

Between August and October, several intensive meetings between Kissinger and Le Duc Tho demonstrated to the Americans that the North Vietnamese were genuinely interested in concluding the war. Beginning with the August 1 session, Le Duc Tho presented a set of proposals which appeared to represent a significant North Vietnamese step toward

⁴⁹ Kissinger, White House Years, p. 1310.

separating the issues regarding the cessation of hostilities from those which sprung from the political differences which had originally animated the conflict---a move which Kissinger had urged for some time.⁵⁰

On September 11, 1972, a broadcast of the Provisional Revolutionary Government acknowledged that the resolution of the war in Vietnam had to take into account the reality of "two administrations, two armies, and other political forces" existing in South Vietnam. This announcement was tantamount to a recognition of the legitimacy of the Thieu government, and represented a radical departure from past proclamations which had made no such admission.⁵¹ But though this language seemed to be in the direction favorable to the U.S., Nixon refused to explore it in any depth because he feared the potential for adverse developments so close to the election.⁵²

⁵⁰ Kissinger, White House Years, pp. 1315-9.

⁵¹ "Hanoi Peace-Talk Adviser in Back in Paris---Vietcong Restate Peace Terms," New York Times, September 12, 1972, p. 12. See the discussion in Goodman, The Lost Peace, pp. 125-129; and Tad Szulc, How Kissinger Did It: Behind the Cease-Fire Agreement," Foreign Policy 15 (Summer 1974): 21-69, especially pp. 48-54.

⁵² Following the August first meeting, Kissinger provided a detailed report to the President, outlining his sense of where he believed the negotiations were heading. Nixon was apparently not sufficiently impressed that a breakthrough was imminent, nor did he care to pursue that possibility. In a memo to Haig (written in the margins of Kissinger's report) the President instructed his aide to play the negotiations for their political value in these last weeks of the campaign:

Nevertheless, efforts to resolve the war had to continue, both for appearances sake and for the chance that a genuine breakthrough might occur.

Kissinger was far more sanguine regarding the prospects for a breakthrough than was Nixon, and spent these weeks traveling between Washington, Saigon, and Paris in an intense effort to bring the three sides in the negotiations closer to an agreement. As Hanoi moved slowly toward a basis of acceptable compromise, Kissinger strained to prepare Washington and Saigon for the settlement.⁵³ In South Vietnam, meanwhile, Thieu began to break ranks with the White House. Concerned that a settlement might see the United States depart South Vietnam completely, leaving the South Vietnamese to manage alone with the duplicitous North Vietnamese, Thieu preferred to press the military advantage extended by the partial retreat of the Communists in the wake of their Easter

Al...Henry must be discouraged...until after the election. We have reached the stage where the mere fact of private talks helps us very little---if at all. We can soon expect the opposition to begin to make that point. Disillusionment about [Kissinger's] talks could be harmful politically---particularly in view of the fact that the Saigon trip, regardless of how we downplay it, may raise expectations. What we need most now is a P.R. game plan to either stop talks or if we continue them to give some hope of progress.

(Cited in Kissinger, White House Years, p. 1319.)

⁵³ Szulc, "How Kissinger Did It," pp. 45-48.

Offensive. But further combat was not possible for the United States. As Kissinger wrote

We had our own imperatives. We had struggled and suffered for four years over a war from which we were trying to disengage. We had accepted nearly unbearable fissures in our society to maintain our honor and credibility. We had sustained our effort only by convincing our public that the one issue on which we would not compromise was to impose a Communist government on an ally...we would not be able to...continue the war in pursuit of unconditional victory...the Congress would...vote us out of the war...undermining the authority of the American Presidency in every corner of the globe.⁵⁴

Clearly the requirements of the conflict had ceased to provide principal motivation behind the actions of the United States as it made its exit from Vietnam. The administration's efforts to accommodate domestic imperatives had become an important, and at times, an overriding element in its war termination calculus.

The Finish Line In Sight

On October 8, Kissinger and Le Duc Tho met in Paris for what promised to be a routine session. Instead, the Communist representative shocked the American delegation by presenting a sweeping proposal which appeared generally consistent with the U.S. position of May 8, particularly as

⁵⁴ Kissinger, White House Years, p. 1324. Emphasis added.

it conformed to the American preference to settle the military issues in advance of the political questions.⁵⁵

The North Vietnamese called for an immediate Indochina-wide cease-fire---including the immediate cessation of all U.S. bombing of North Vietnam, withdrawal of all U.S. and allied troops from South Vietnam within 60 days of an agreement, and the mutual return of all POWs. The proposal was intentionally silent on the withdrawal of North Vietnamese troops from South Vietnam and on the specific political arrangements to be established in South Vietnam following an agreement. Kissinger immediately recognized that with this proposal, the North Vietnamese had come as far as could realistically be expected on the basic principles of a settlement, though the details of its implementation remained to be worked out. Acknowledging an agreement in principle on October 17, Kissinger undertook to obtain the approval of

55 To make way for settlement on the military issues, Hanoi's proposal contained a number of elements which dealt, in principle, with the political problems: it withdrew its demands that Thieu be replaced and that a tripartite coalition government, consisting of representatives of the PRG, the Saigon government, and neutral elements, be established in advance of any settlement. Proposing instead its "National Council of National Reconciliation and Concord," Hanoi accepted the continued existence of Thieu as head of the Saigon government. The White House immediately recognized the significance of this offer. See Nixon's secret letter to Thieu dated October 16, 1972 in Hung and Schecter, The Palace File, pp. 377-8.

Washington and Saigon in order that a final settlement might be concluded by the end of the month.⁵⁶

In a rush to capitalize on what he believed was an extraordinary opportunity for the United States, Kissinger raced to Saigon on October 24 to detail the main elements of the proposal to Thieu and obtain the South Vietnamese' endorsement of the plan. But at the Imperial Palace, Thieu proved resolute in his rejection of the proposal, focusing on three aspects of the agreement which struck Saigon as particularly troublesome: the National Council of National Reconciliation and Concord translated into Vietnamese as a coalition government, and Thieu would not accept this; no provisions were made to restore the Demilitarized Zone as a national border between North and South Vietnam; and, perhaps most disturbing, the proposed agreement was silent on the issue of North Vietnam's withdrawal from South Vietnam.⁵⁷

Thieu was not alone in his concerns. Among Kissinger's advisers there was no small amount of worry that perhaps events were unfolding too rapidly, and that in Kissinger's

⁵⁶ The fact that Kissinger tried so hard to separate the political and the military issues illustrates the dramatic disarticulation of force and political purpose that had come to characterize the Vietnam war for the United States. For both the North and South Vietnamese this separation was of course incomprehensible; they were fighting precisely because of the political differences between them.

⁵⁷ "At Last, the Shape of a Settlement," Time, October 30, 1972, pp. 13-17. See also Hung and Schecter, The Palace File, pp. 98-106.

haste, an agreement founded on deliberately ambiguous terms or conditions fundamentally unfavorable to South Vietnam (such as the presence of Communist troops) might lead to a settlement not worth the paper to print.⁵⁸ Kissinger returned to Washington with a list of some dozens of modifications to the agreement demanded by Saigon.

With this wrinkle in the settlement schedule, concerns began developing in Washington that Hanoi was reconsidering its offer and was even planning another offensive operation for the following Spring; a development which would only further delay complete U.S. withdrawal from Vietnam. The prospect of renewed combat would undoubtedly prompt Congress to wrest control of the situation away from the White House and enact legislation requiring the full and complete withdrawal of American troops from Vietnam in exchange only for the return of POWs; the South Vietnamese would be left to their own devices. Clearly in Kissinger's mind, the time was ripe for the United States to obtain a settlement, and the interests of Saigon were of secondary importance. But while the United States partially suspended its bombing of North Vietnam as an indication that it was receptive to Hanoi's proposal, it nevertheless informed Hanoi that there were

⁵⁸ Reportedly, one aide close to the negotiations observed: "Henry was rushing things too much; it was getting too sloppy." (Cited in Szulc, "How Kissinger Did It," p. 52.) See also Goodman, The Lost Peace, p. 131.

problems with the agreement and a settlement could not possibly be in hand by the October 31 target.

Why did North Vietnam offer the terms it did at the October 8 meeting? A number of incentives apparently motivated Hanoi to seek an agreement at this time. Events on the American campaign trail clearly demonstrated that Nixon's re-election was a certainty, and North Vietnam may have feared that the terms of settlement put forth by the administration might harden after the election when the President was no longer politically vulnerable.⁵⁹ Moreover, their own Easter Offensive, with the retaliatory aerial bombardment and mining operations by the U.S. had exacted a dear price; additional warfare was simply becoming more and more difficult.⁶⁰ Finally, there could be little doubt that Hanoi was growing suspicious of its chief benefactors, the Soviet Union and the

⁵⁹ "The Chances for a Cease-Fire---Signs of a Hanoi Switch," U.S. News and World Report, October 23, 1972, pp. 28-29. Before Nixon's re-election became plain, the North Vietnamese had some inducement to hold out for an agreement until after the November ballot because McGovern's terms were so favorable to them. See Christopher Lydon, "McGovern Details Plan to End War on Inauguration," New York Times, October 11, 1972, pp. 1, 29. See also the comparison of Nixon's and McGovern's terms to end the war with the terms of the Communists in "Three Plans for Peace in Vietnam," The New York Times, October 15, 1972, p. IV-1.

⁶⁰ Szulc, "How Kissinger Did It," pp. 53, 59.

People's Republic of China, as they entered a new era of relations with its principal adversary.⁶¹

With its concessions of October 8 yielding no effective results, North Vietnam now found itself in an awkward position. On October 26 in a calculated move to force a settlement, Hanoi broadcasted the terms which Kissinger and Tho had agreed on, and publicly demanded that the United States honor its commitments.⁶² The United States was forced to respond, and in a nationally televised press conference hours after the Communist broadcast, Kissinger underscored Hanoi's assertion (and thereby overruled Saigon's objections) that a breakthrough had been achieved. Yes, he proclaimed, "Peace is at hand."⁶³

Kissinger's words were premature. With Hanoi's public disclosure of the settlement terms, Nixon felt cornered into action and he rebelled. Speaking to the nation on November 2, the President proclaimed that the United States would not

61 See "Why Hanoi Came to Realize It 'Could Not Hope to Win'," U.S. News and World Report, November 6, 1972, pp. 17-19; "The Shape of Peace," Time, November 6, 1972, pp. 14-18; and "The Vietnam Deal: Why Now?" Newsweek, November 6, 1972, pp. 36-39.

62 "Negotiations Relating to the Vietnam Problem: Statement by the Government of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, October 26, 1972." Contained in American Foreign Relations 1972: A Documentary Record (New York: New York University Press, 1976), pp. 278-285.

63 "News Conference Statement by Dr. Henry A. Kissinger, October 26, 1972," Presidential Documents, (October 30, 1972), pp. 1565-68.

be "stampeded" into signing an agreement simply to meet an election deadline,⁶⁴ and his strong words effectively dashed all hopes that a settlement might be reached in advance of what was now certain to be Nixon's re-election. A greater danger, however, was that the opportunity for settlement had passed completely, and that the North Vietnamese would re-examine their position and harden their terms. Nixon was less worried than Kissinger over this possibility, and the different perspectives of the two men revealed, again, dissimilar imperatives.

Having long been certain of re-election, Nixon considered the breakthrough of October 8, combined with the urgency with which Hanoi appeared to desire a settlement, to be North Vietnam's realization, at long last, of the improbability of their position. Thus the President expected that perhaps even better terms could be achieved if the United States played the next phase shrewdly. There simply was no need to rush an agreement as long as the domestic pressures for a settlement were not expected to again become significant until after the President's second Inaugural.⁶⁵ As Congress will have already reconvened two weeks earlier by that point, Nixon fully expected a resumption of the stiff pressure to end the war. Nevertheless, Hanoi's presentation of its

⁶⁴ Public Papers: RMN, 1972, p. 1086.

⁶⁵ See Murrey Marder, "Deliberate Stall Seen on Peace," Washington Post, November 9, 1972, pp. 1, A12.

conciliatory position in early October gave the President over three months to improve the terms. The strategic considerations seemed permissive of a settlement, and thus to Nixon, domestic political factors were more significant in setting a time frame for final agreement, and here the President had room to maneuver.

Though certainly familiar with the domestic political forces which operated on this issue, Kissinger's sensitivity to strategic considerations urged a different schedule. Hanoi had opened a window on October 8; Thieu's intransigence and Nixon's lack of urgency threatened to close it, perhaps permanently. To Kissinger's mind, the North Vietnamese could not be expected to maintain its offer on the table indefinitely, particularly if they suspected that their own misinterpretation of the state of affairs had led to an unnecessarily generous offer of terms. The opportunity for the United States to shape an acceptable peace began slipping through the administration's fingers.

A Rise in the Road

North Vietnam returned to Paris in late November wary of the Americans, though apparently still prepared to execute an agreement along the lines of the October 8 proposal. Though they were no doubt aware of the serious split which had developed between Washington and Saigon, they were not prepared for the presentation of nearly seventy changes to the working document which Thieu had insisted upon. After a

day to examine the changes, the North Vietnamese delegation returned to the conference table and began making demands of their own: they now refused to release American POWs unless Saigon released all detained Viet Cong, and they insisted on their description of the National Council of National Reconciliation and Concord.⁶⁶ Further, Le Duc Tho continually refused to let the technical discussions proceed while he and Kissinger hammered out a basic agreement. All the signs pointed to an impasse.

Throughout most of November, in preparation for its departure, the United States had undertaken a massive operation to outfit and supply South Vietnam with tons of military weapons systems and hardware.⁶⁷ But neither this influx of material nor Nixon's personal, though secret, promises that the United States was prepared to enforce an agreement with military means, if necessary, convinced the South Vietnamese President that the terms currently under

⁶⁶ The function of the National Council of National Reconciliation and Concord proved to be a major sticking point in the agreement, because of the sensitivity to any arrangement which even suggested a coalition government for South Vietnam. Though both parties had described this council as an 'administrative structure,' the word which the North Vietnamese insisted upon using connoted governmental authority.

⁶⁷ This U.S. effort was code-named Operation Enhance Plus. See Phillip B. Davidson, Vietnam at War (Novato, California: Presidio Press, 1988), pp. 718-740, passim. For a discussion of how the operation fit into the overall strategy of these weeks see, Kissinger, White House Years, pp. 1366, 1370-1, 1402, and Nixon, RN: Memoirs, p. 697

discussion would represent a favorable, or even survivable, arrangement for South Vietnam.⁶⁸ With Thieu still unmoved, Nixon instructed Kissinger to work for an agreement based on the October 8 formulation, and to inform Saigon of the overriding domestic imperatives which compelled the U.S. to settle:

In my view the October 8 agreement was one which certainly would have been in our interest. You should try to improve it to take account of Saigon's conditions as much as possible. But most important we must recognize the fundamental reality that we have no choice but to reach agreement along the lines of the October 8 principles....You should inform the Saigon representatives [in Paris] that all military and economic aid will be cut off by the Congress if an agreement is not reached.⁶⁹

⁶⁸ The fact that Nixon kept these promises secret speaks volumes for the pressure the President felt to end the war. Over the course of these final years of U.S. combat involvement, Nixon sent over two dozen such secret communications to South Vietnamese President Thieu to reassure him that the United States was committed to the defense of its ally. In the letters of the weeks immediately preceding the signing of the peace treaty, Nixon explicitly and repeatedly assured Thieu that the United States would "...respond with full force should the settlement be violated by North Vietnam." (Secret Letter from Richard Nixon to Nguyen Van Thieu dated January 5, 1973. Contained in Hung and Schecter, The Palace File, p. 392.) Nixon could not risk public knowledge of these secret promises because it would raise prospects of additional costs and U.S. reinvolverment, leading Americans to be convinced that, rather than ending U.S. involvement, the President was promising to extend it, if only in a different form. In addition to the Hung and Schecter work, see "Can South Vietnam Survive a Cease-Fire?" U.S. News and World Report, November 13, 1972, pp. 26-7; and Sylvan Fox, "Pledges to Thieu by U.S. Reported," New York Times, January 28, 1973, p. 23.

⁶⁹ Nixon, RN: Memoirs, p. 722.

Though Nixon moderated these instructions in subsequent communication with Kissinger, the stark reality which underlay them remained unchanged. Events in Vietnam, or even at the negotiating forum in Paris, were rapidly losing their significance to U.S. policy making regarding further involvement in Vietnam. The next session of Congress, scheduled to open January 9, was clearly the most important factor now shaping the American effort.

When the Americans met again with the North Vietnamese in early December, there was little hope that the impasse that had developed in the talks could be overcome, particularly as Saigon remained obstinate in its demands for changes in the draft agreement. As it turned out, Hanoi's responded to the changes demanded by the United States (on behalf of Saigon) by a retrenchment to the position it held before it offered the October concessions. The only alternative to what essentially amounted the complete re-negotiation of all issues that Le Duc Tho would consider was U.S. acceptance of the October 8 formulation with no changes by either side. While developments over several days of meetings revealed that this alternative was in fact not the only one Hanoi would consider, a break-off in the talks nevertheless appeared unavoidable, and on December 13 the talks were suspended.

Kissinger attributed the impasse to Hanoi's belief that the sharp differences between Saigon and Washington, combined

with the prospects of unmanageable political pressures which the return of the American Congress represented to Nixon, could only redound to their benefit.⁷⁰ There seemed little incentive for the North Vietnamese to offer any concessions in exchange for the full and complete departure of the United States from Vietnam when it appeared that the U.S. Congress would simply vote a withdrawal in a few short weeks. After much discussion within the White House, the President, now desirous of a settlement on almost any basis decided to exert maximum military pressure on Hanoi to settle, and ordered extensive B-52 raids on North Vietnam.⁷¹

On December 18, Operation Linebacker II began.⁷² Centered on Hanoi, the raids constituted the most intense, sustained aerial bombardment campaign of the entire war, and the domestic reaction in the United States, as well as abroad,

⁷⁰ Kissinger, White House Years, p. 1445.

⁷¹ See the discussion in Kissinger, White House Years, pp. 1446-9. Interestingly, Kissinger observes that in ordering bombing raids to force a conclusion to the war, Nixon had "reasoned, correctly, that he would pay a serious domestic price for lifting the self-imposed bombing restrictions; but it would become unmanageable only if he failed."

⁷² The fact that this operation came to be known as the "Christmas Bombing," obscures the small fact that no bombs were dropped on Christmas day. This fleeting pause, however, was but a brief respite for the North Vietnamese who were pounded by B-52 raids until December 30. But despite the immense amount of ordnance dropped on North Vietnam, by their own reports, civilian casualties were relatively small, ranging from 1300 to 1600 fatalities. See the account in Guenther Lewy, America in Vietnam (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), pp. 413-4.

was enormously negative.⁷³ As the bombing continued, the U.S. maintained contact with the North Vietnamese delegation in Paris, though the latter terminated talks on the technical modalities of implementing any agreement for three days on December 20 in protest over the bombing raids. On December 30, the U.S. announced that Hanoi had accepted a U.S. proposal to resume substantive talks on the major issues and that the bombing had ceased.

In one respect, the 'Christmas' bombing of 1972 reflected the war in microcosm: serious domestic opposition to the President's policies could be contained as long as those policies yielded rapid results. But this episode differs from the wider war in another important way. While neither a sense of the kind of results nor a time frame within which

⁷³ The New York Times editorialized: "...civilized man will be horrified at the renewed spectacle of the world's mightiest air force mercilessly pounding a small Asian nation in an abuse of national power and disregard of humanitarian principles." ("Back to the Stone Age," New York Times, December 20, 1972, p. 42.) The Los Angeles Times echoed this sentiment: "Of all the errors made in the war...of all the willful uses of arbitrary power, this one is the most shocking because the means used are so grossly disproportionate to the ends sought." ("Beyond All Reason," Los Angeles Times, December 28, 1972, p. II-6.) See also the New York Times editorial "Terror From the Skies," December 22, 1972, p. 30; "Terror Bombing in the Name of Peace," Washington Post editorial, December 28, 1972; and "About the Bombing," Wall Street Journal editorial, December 27, 1972. For press commentary after the bombing was halted see, "Outrage and Relief," Time, January 8, 1973, p. 14; and, "What Went Wrong?" Newsweek, January 1, 1973, pp. 8-10, 12. See also, Martin F. Herz, The Prestige Press and the Christmas Bombing, 1972 (Washington, D.C.: Ethics and Public Policy Center, 1980).

they should be achieved ever developed for the war in general, the bombing campaign of December 1972 had both a clear objective and a schedule. The aerial bombardment had to yield a settlement by the time Congress reconvened in January. In fact, the bombing was halted in the last days of December, and while the administration experienced intense domestic and international pressure to halt the bombing, it had been able to withstand that pressure because of Hanoi's rapid return to the bargaining table.

Two questions persist regarding the events of the closing months of the war: Why did Nixon order the bombing? and Did the bombing 'force' North Vietnam's return to the negotiating table? Definitive answers might never be know, but nevertheless, it seems certain that domestic political factors strongly influenced both Nixon's decision to bomb and North Vietnam's decision to return to Paris.

The White House had primed the American audience for nearly two months with reports that peace was tantalizingly close. But settlement proved elusive. Thieu's stubborn refusal to accept the terms of the agreement as it stood and Nixon's notion that he had until his second Inaugural to secure a settlement (on perhaps better terms) caused North Vietnam to retrench. By December, the White House faced the prospects of no settlement and a hostile Congress ready to reconvene and take the issue from Nixon's hands. The democratically controlled legislature would enact an end to the war, and

establish what, from the point of view of the White House, would be a dangerous precedent in Executive-Congressional relations just at the outset of Nixon's second term. The administration felt compelled to act. One U.S. negotiator in Paris observed that "Hanoi had refused to negotiate seriously by December, and the bombing was the only means we had left to get the negotiations going again."⁷⁴

Was the bombing responsible for North Vietnam's agreement to resume talks? Some have speculated that Hanoi had suffered a critical depletion of its military resources as a result of the sustained bombing and thus were anxious to take up the negotiations again.⁷⁵ Hanoi's account of events, of course, disputes this.⁷⁶ One thing is certain: the North Vietnamese were keenly aware of and sensitive to the domestic political environment in the United States. They no doubt anticipated the challenge Nixon would face when Congress reconvened in early January. Why, then, did they not wait for Congress to legislate U.S. disengagement?

⁷⁴ Reported in Goodman, The Lost Peace, p. 164.

⁷⁵ Tad Szulc reports that the U.S. learned, only after the bombing was halted, that Hanoi was reduced to a two-day supply of surface-to-air missiles when the U.S. finally halted the bombing. "How Kissinger Did It," p. 62. See also "Periscope," Newsweek, February 23, 1973, p. 13.

⁷⁶ Henry Giniger, "Hanoi's Reaction: Aide in Paris Denies Yielding to Pressure From Washington," New York Times, December 31, 1972, pp. 1, 3; and Seymour M. Hersh, "U.S. Aides Differ Sharply Over Value of the Raids," New York Times, December 31, 1972, pp. 1, 4. See also Goodman, The Lost Peace, pp. 161-2.

One might reasonably suppose that they were genuinely uncertain regarding the power of Congress to bring about such an end; Nixon had proved to be a formidable adversary and a daring politician. The Christmas bombing was not only enormously unpopular---both in the United States and around the World---it held measurable political risks for the President who faced four years of programs, budgets, and legislation with a Congress controlled by the opposition party; and yet he persisted. Nixon's determined perseverance to continue the bombing and the fact that he had a measure of political security by virtue of his landslide re-election, gave North Vietnam cause to re-examine what advantages their cooperation at this juncture might yield. The Communists wanted the U.S. out of the war, and the American's frenzied bombing, which resulted from Hanoi's deaf ear in Paris, signalled to the Communists that this was one objective at least which they shared with their powerful adversary.

Thus, while it seems certain that North Vietnam's military capability was significantly impaired as a result of the sustained bombing, a more likely explanation for their return to the negotiating table lies in the fact that they too, perceived that the opportunity to have the U.S. withdraw from the conflict had indeed arrived. One assessment of these events made after the Peace Accords were signed observed:

For all of Hanoi's...troubles, it was hard for those who have watched the North Vietnamese fight doggedly against one foreign power after another for nearly three decades to imagine that the Communists were now about to give up the battle.

Instead it seemed likely that Hanoi had made a very calculated decision to shift tactics, not goals--- and that, after an interval to get the U.S. off the scene, the war would go on.⁷⁷

Clearly the American leadership had reached the point where settlement had become the overriding motivation behind its actions. Earlier in the month, Nixon had corresponded secretly with Thieu and explicitly threatened the South Vietnamese President to cooperate in U.S. efforts to conclude the war or else face the prospect that the U.S. would act on its own to end its involvement in the war. On one of the letters in his own hand at the bottom of the prepared text, Nixon wrote:

I have asked General Haig to obtain your answer to this absolutely final offer on my part for us to work together in seeking a settlement along the lines I have approved or to go our separate ways. Let me emphasize ...that General Haig is not coming to Saigon for the purpose of negotiating with you...[y]ou must decide now whether you desire to continue our alliance or whether you want me to seek a settlement with the enemy which serves U.S. interests alone.⁷⁸

Thieu understood this to mean that since Washington was not interested in any sort of discussion with him on the acceptability of the terms of settlement as they currently stood, his cooperation at this point was simply to insure

⁷⁷ "How Solid a Peace?" Newsweek, January 29, 1973, p. 20.

⁷⁸ Kissinger, White House Years, pp. 1459-60, emphasis added. This December 17 letter from Nixon to Thieu appears to be the only one missing from the otherwise comprehensive collection presented in the Hung and Schecter volume.

continued U.S. assistance to his nation.⁷⁹ The devaluing of U.S. war objectives was complete. The President's letter reveals that the fuller achievement of the original war aims would not motivate continued American involvement in Vietnam, and the tone of the letter also suggested that the White House no longer considered the reputation of the United States as a reliable ally to be at stake if the United States parted company with South Vietnam in the face of Thieu's persistent refusal to cooperate in a settlement. This much was clear: Nixon would conclude a settlement without Saigon before he would accept being overtaken by the Congressional forces that would remove all Presidential discretion regarding the terms on which the U.S. would withdraw from Vietnam.⁸⁰

A Photo-Finish

In January 1973 Kissinger and Le Duc Tho resumed their talks and after just two days of discussions reached a breakthrough.⁸¹ Thieu remained opposed to the terms to the

⁷⁹ Hung and Schechter, The Palace File, p. 140.

⁸⁰ The President, as well as a number of other informed observers fully expected Congressional action to end the war upon its reconvening in January. See, for example, "As the Air War Hit a Peak," U.S. News and World Report, January 8, 1973, pp. 17; "Chances for Peace-Problems Nixon Faces," U.S. News and World Report, January 15, 1973, pp. 11-12; and "At War Over the War," Newsweek, January 15, 1973, pp. 13-15.

⁸¹ While Kissinger and Le Duc Tho met January 8 and 9, the technical talks had actually resumed several days earlier on January 2, and continued for a number of days after Kissinger

very end, despite Nixon's repeated private assurances that he would do his utmost to ensure that the United States would carefully monitor the implementation of the agreement and intercede to prevent any egregious violations by North Vietnam.⁸²

and Tho adjourned. As the senior-most representative of their respective governments, Kissinger and Tho were empowered to reach a formal agreement; thus their meetings were obviously more significant.

82 Nixon's promises to Thieu made during the critical last months immediately preceding the formal settlement are strikingly vague despite their strong language. In October Nixon assured Thieu that the United States would 'continue to provide...the fullest support, including... whatever military assistance is consistent with the cease fire provisions... Letter from Nixon to Thieu, dated October 16, 1972. Contained in Hung and Schechter, The Palace File, pp. 377-8 (This letter, as well as the other communications between the two Presidents cited in this note, is completely reproduced in the Hung and Schechter volume.) Interestingly, Nixon penned the following postscript to this letter: "Dr. Kissinger, General Haig and I have discussed this proposal at great length. I am personally convinced it is the best we will be able to get and that it meets my absolute condition that the GVN [Government of (South) Vietnam] must survive as a free country." Emphasis original.

In another letter dated November 14, 1972, Nixon wrote Thieu: "You have my absolute assurance that if Hanoi fails to abide by the terms of this agreement it is my intention to take swift and severe retaliatory action." (The Palace File, pp. 385-8.) Again on January 5, 1973, Nixon assured Thieu of his pledge to "[continue] assistance in the post settlement period," and he reaffirmed that the United States would "respond with full force should the settlement be violated by North Vietnam." (The Palace File, p. 392.) And as late as January 17, 1973, Nixon pledged that the United States would 'react vigorously' to violations of the agreement (The Palace File, pp.393-395.) Nixon's reluctance to specify the nature and extent of any military response which the United States might take in the face of North Vietnamese violations of the peace agreement reveals his recognition of his very limited ability to deliver on specific promises given the overwhelming American desire to be out of Vietnam for good.

In Washington, the 93d Congress opened its session with several overwhelming caucus votes against continued funding for the war.⁸³ January 20, the date of Nixon's second inaugural, loomed for all as the deadline against which the President had no recourse. But by then events plainly indicated a settlement was at hand, and on the evening of January 23, Nixon announced that Kissinger and Tho initialed an agreement that would "end the war and bring peace with honor to Vietnam and Southeast Asia." In the brief announcement, Nixon told the American people that the goals which he had considered "essential for peace with honor" had been met:

In the settlement that has now been agreed to, all the conditions that I laid down [on January 25, and May 8, 1972] have been met:

A cease-fire, internationally supervised, will begin at 7 P.M., this Saturday, January 27, Washington time.

Within 60 days from this Sunday, all Americans held prisoners of war throughout Indochina will be released. There will be the fullest possible accounting for all of those who are missing in action.

During the same 60-day period, all American forces will be withdrawn from South Vietnam.

⁸³ On January 2 the House Democratic Caucus voted 154-75 to approve a resolution cutting off funds for the war conditional only on the release of American POWs. In the Senate, the Foreign Relations Committee reached a consensus that if a peace agreement "did not materialize by Inauguration Day, Congress should indeed use its powers to end the war itself." And in a lukewarm vote of confidence for the President, members of the Republican Senate Caucus voted 16-10 endorsing Nixon's effort to "end the tragic conflict in Indochina now through a negotiated settlement." "At War Over the War," Newsweek, January 15, 1973, pp. 13-15.

The people of South Vietnam have been guaranteed the right to determine their own future, without outside interference.⁸⁴

Though the President said that the United States' objectives were fulfilled by the Paris Agreement, his claim was incomplete---the terms did not reflect the essential basis of 'peace with honor,' rather, they provided the conditions under which the United States could terminate its involvement in the war. And these conditions allowed North Vietnam to claim its objectives achieved also: Communist troops would remain in South Vietnam, the NLF would be guaranteed legitimate political participation in South Vietnam, and the United States was leaving the war.

The U.S. had not stopped Hanoi from attempting to overthrow the Saigon regime and achieve a unified, and socialist, Vietnam. In fact, with the forward positioning of its troops in South Vietnam, and the political legitimacy of the NLF guaranteed by the accords, Hanoi's ability to fully achieve its objective of a unified Vietnam was far greater in 1973 than it had been in 1965 when American troops were first ordered into combat.

But on that January evening in 1973, the President's voice did not waver and his message was clear: the war, for the United States, was over.

⁸⁴ "Address to the Nation Announcing Conclusion of an Agreement on Ending the War and Restoring Peace in Vietnam," January 23, 1973, Public Papers: RMN, 1973, pp. 18-20. Pp. 18-19.

Summary

Finding an acceptable end to the war was the most pressing task of the first Nixon administration. The White House adopted a strategy of Vietnamization and gradual troop withdrawals to reduce the level of fighting while simultaneously attempting to negotiate a settlement with North Vietnam. But uneven progress in negotiations and increasingly strident domestic calls for the war to end led the administration to reconsider the objectives which the United States pursued in this war. The result was both diminished importance of the original war aims and lower standards against which achievement of those objectives would be measured.

The present chapter chapter has focused on the administration's subtle devaluation of U.S. war objectives, and the domestic factors which motivated that transformation. Its central argument has been that the administration's policy for war termination was driven largely by factors of domestic politics, and that that focus primarily accounts for the behavior of the United States in the closing stages of the war. The following comparison of settlement terms illustrates the migration in U.S. position on major issues of the war. Of particular importance is the fact that the Americans substantially altered their demand for a mutual troop withdrawal. At the point of settlement, the United States accepted the continued presence of North Vietnamese

**Comparison of Early Nixon Administration Position on Major Issues of the War With
Final Peace Terms**

	U.S. Eight Point Proposal 1969	Terms of Settlement 1973
Cease-Fire	Internationally supervised cease-fire in effect immediately. Complete cessation of combat after a year of troop withdrawals.	Cease-fire in place to take effect twenty-four hours after signing.
Withdrawal of Troops	Gradual withdrawal of most US, allied and NVA forces over 12 months following agreement on mutual withdrawal of troops. Remainder of US troops to be withdrawn completely as NVA forces depart South Vietnam.	All U.S. (and allied) forces, installations, and equipment will be completely withdrawn within 60 days; the U.S. will not continue its military involvement in Vietnam; no provision for NVA withdrawal from South Vietnam.
POWs	Not specifically addressed.	Mutual return of POWs to be carried out simultaneously with the troop withdrawals.
Interim Provisional Government	Full, peaceful, participation of all political elements; no coercion to impose any form of government.	Tripartite 'National Council of National Reconciliation and Concord' [NCNRC] composed of representatives of GVN, NLF and neutral party to be established within 90 days of agreement to set procedures for general elections in South Vietnam.
Elections	Elections open to all who renounce use of force, under international supervision.	"Free and Democratic" elections will be held in South Vietnam under international supervision at a time to be established by the NCNRC.
Reunification	No objection if South Vietnamese so choose.	To be carried out in accordance with agreement to be worked out by North and South Vietnam. Pending reunification, the DMZ shall be considered provisional, and not a political or territory boundary.
Foreign Policy	Neutrality acceptable if South Vietnamese so choose. (Drawn from Nixon's first major policy address on Vietnam given May 8, 1969)	South Vietnam will be neutral. (Drawn from the "Agreement on Ending the War and Restoring the Peace in Vietnam" January 27, 1973)

troops in South Vietnam in return for the opportunity to terminate its involvement in the war.

In the course of trying to end the war in Vietnam, the Nixon administration recast and devalued the objectives of the war to a level that could be sustained by the conditions prevailing on the battlefield in Vietnam and at the negotiating table in Paris. Was this devaluation done consciously? Kissinger writes:

In the process of meeting the demands of our insatiable opponents in the media and the Congress, we had already reduced our terms to a level far below that which had been thought necessary to maintain the security of South Korea under much more favorable circumstances and over twenty years after the end of the Korean War. Whereas 50,000 American combat troops were still stationed in Korea, we proposed to withdraw all our troops from Vietnam, which had much longer and much less easily defended frontiers and an even more implacable enemy. All Thieu would get...was a cease-fire with an enemy who had observed no agreement since 1954. In exchange the United States would totally withdraw, not likely to return.⁸⁵

Clearly, what the U.S. was willing to settle for was markedly reduced through years of trying to find an acceptable settlement.

Over the course of U.S. involvement in Vietnam, official justification for the war had hinged on two claims: halting the spread of Communism in Asia, and providing the support necessary to establish a secure regime in Saigon capable of

⁸⁵ Kissinger, White House Years, p. 1325.

directing its own defense with competent forces to do so. But during the Nixon administration's search for peace, claims that a U.S. military presence in Vietnam was necessary to check the spread of Communism became muted, particularly in the wake of Nixon's dramatic visits to Red China and the Soviet Union. And the effort to establish a secure and sovereign Saigon came under scrutiny for the degree to which the U.S. would be responsible for underwriting that guarantee. When administration officials came to realize that this objective could only be achieved with a clear military victory over the North Vietnamese, they began advancing a 'stable' South Vietnam as the aim, knowing full well that the effort required to secure a decisive military victory could never be sustained with the American public.

With the clear military defeat of North Vietnam not possible, the task became one of determining the military and political conditions under which the U.S. could depart Vietnam with some assurance that Saigon could withstand pressure from Hanoi on its own. The adequate performance of the ARVN in the Communists' 1972 Easter Offensive convinced Washington that the U.S. could withdraw its forces with a reasonable hope that a bloodbath would not follow immediately on its heels. Though few in Washington harbored any expectations that South Vietnam had become a military equal to its northern adversary, developments indicated that Saigon was strong 'enough' that the U.S. could withdraw without sacrificing its ally.

Some have levied the accusation that the Nixon administration would be satisfied with only some 'decent interval' between its departure and the eventual collapse of the Saigon government. This argument extends its taproot to the ambiguous point---short of clear military victory over North Vietnam---at which the United States could terminate its involvement in the war. The 'decent interval' interpretation of events suggests a willingness on the part of the President and his advisers, notably Henry Kissinger, to accept a settlement that would leave South Vietnam with the prospect that it would probably fall to the Communists after a period of time sufficient to enable the U.S. to save some face. The reality of the situation was more complex, however.

As 1972 drew to a close, the administration knew that the domestic will in the United States to sustain any further commitment in Southeast Asia had all but completely evaporated. A number of battlefield encounters with the enemy demonstrated that the ARVN had developed into a credible---if not formidable---military force, and the sense developed in Washington that South Vietnam might now be genuinely able to handle its own defenses without the presence of American troops. With the battlefield situation stabilized, the administration searched for a point in the negotiations at which it could declare that its objectives had been achieved.

The October 8 offer by North Vietnam to separate the military and political issues and to settle the former in advance of working out the exact details of the latter gave the United States the opportunity it was looking for. Saigon, however, was not cooperative. Thieu remained opposed to settlement along the lines which Kissinger and Tho were proceeding, principally because North Vietnamese troops would be allowed to remain in South Vietnam, and went public with his objections. The South Vietnamese insisted on a number of significant modifications to the working draft of the agreement which threatened the very possibility of a settlement. Thieu's intransigence also made public the yawning gap which had developed between the positions of Washington and Saigon and severely circumscribed U.S. flexibility in the negotiations. The talks stalled while the White House attempted to repair the damage.

Obstacles to a peace agreement at this point also developed in the United States. Nixon feared that rushing to settle in advance of an already assured re-election would smack of political pandering. Moreover, the White House thought that if Hanoi appeared conciliatory now, perhaps the United States could use the time between November and January to improve the military capability of its ally and perhaps even secure better terms from Hanoi. But the differences between Saigon and Washington and the administration's lackluster response to the North Vietnamese offer of October 8 combined to harden the position of the Communists. Hanoi now believed that

perhaps its concessions had been made prematurely and that the fissures between Saigon and Washington could be exploited. With the domestic pressure for the end of the war in the United States continuing unabated (Congress would reconvene in early January and gave all signs of enacting legislation to end U.S. involvement in the region) intransigence at this point might yield more favorable conditions for North Vietnam.

Realizing that a very real opportunity to conclude a settlement was slipping from its fingers, the White House ordered extensive bombing of Hanoi and Haiphong Harbor to induce the North Vietnamese to resume negotiating. On December 30 they agreed to take up the talks again, and quickly arrived at an acceptable formulation with Kissinger and his aides so that the war, for the United States, might end.

By the end of 1972, both sides had a number of reasons to believe that the conditions for settlement were ripe. The time to conclude a settlement was clearly at hand. In signing the formal agreement on January 27, 1973, both sides declared their satisfaction with its terms. The North Vietnamese claimed victory, and in its turn, the United States claimed that its objectives had been achieved: U.S. troops were leaving Vietnam, American prisoners of war were being released, and South Vietnam appeared stable enough to provide for its own defense. The war, for this country, was over.

Epilogue

It has been a long and hard fight and we have lost...The severity of the defeat and the circumstances of it...seem to call for a reassessment of the policies of niggardly half measures which have characterized much of our participation here despite the commitment of manpower and resources which were certainly generous...Let us hope that we will not have another Vietnam experience and that we have learned our lesson. Saigon signing off.¹

It was an extraordinary scene. As thousands of South Vietnamese crushed against the U.S. embassy compound walls on Thong Nhut Boulevard in Saigon, a steady stream of CH-53 Sea Stallion and CH-46 Sea Knight helicopters threaded their way through the anarchy of mortar shells and small arms fire to alight briefly on the embassy roof, vacuum up a load of passengers, and quickly peel away to the ships of the 7th Fleet idling off the shores of Vung Tau, an old French colonial resort village on the southeast coast of Vietnam. In the last desperate hours before the collapse of Saigon---and in blatant violation of U.S. law---thousands of Vietnamese were evacuated to the Philippines, Guam, Taiwan and the United States; many more, however, were left behind to an uncertain fate. U.S. Ambassador Graham Martin was

¹ Last CIA Saigon station message, Polgar-Colby, dated April 30, 1975. Cited in Frank Snapp, Decent Interval (New York: Random House, 1977), pp. 556-7.

among the last Americans to leave Saigon, and his reluctance to depart was finally overcome only by a direct order from the President of the United States.

From the decks of the vessels of the 7th Fleet, helicopters were pushed into the South China Sea to make room for the swelling numbers of refugees, while back in Saigon, U.S. marines and other U.S. officials waited with several dozen Vietnamese for the final lift out of the city. But a Presidential order stipulating that only U.S. citizens were to be evacuated at this point forced the Americans to slip away from their Vietnamese friends and flee to the embassy rooftop to board the single chopper that would carry them along the frantic route to the American ships positioned offshore. The abandoned Vietnamese scoured the air over Saigon for any sign that the helicopters---which had been emphatically promised---were returning to whisk them to safety. As they waited in vain, the flight carrying the last Americans from Vietnam touched down on the decks of the U.S.S. Okinawa. It was 5:30 in the morning on April 30, 1975.

Seven days earlier, on a hot, sultry evening in New Orleans, President Gerald Ford addressed a Tulane University audience, and sounded a theme all too familiar in his young presidency: turn away from the wounded past and look to the healing future: "America can regain the sense of pride that

existed before Vietnam," he intoned soberly---the war "is finished as far as America is concerned."²

This work chose the signing of the Paris Accords on January 27, 1973 to mark the end of the Vietnam war for the United States. Nevertheless, there are certain arguments which support fixing the end of U.S. involvement as April 30, 1975. First, there was a sizable group of U.S. officials in South Vietnam---some 8,000---after the Paris Peace Accords were signed in 1973, and the American contingent had an active role in the post-truce environment. Second, although the last American combat troops had departed South Vietnam in 1973, the United States continued its staggering economic assistance to Saigon, pouring hundreds of millions of dollars into South Vietnam between January 1973 and April 1975. Though the American Congress sharply circumscribed U.S. aid to Saigon in 1974, the figures nevertheless remained considerable to the end. Thus even though Americans were no longer fighting in the war, clearly what the U.S. did, or failed to do, was of great importance to events in Vietnam.

But perhaps the most compelling reason that April 1975 is frequently cited as the end of the war, lies in the way in which America left South Vietnam. The United States did not leave by choice; the Americans were all but thrown out. No

² "An Agenda for America's Third Century," Department of State Bulletin 72 (May 12, 1975): 593-5, p. 593.

one who experienced the anarchy in the lawless streets of Saigon, or watched the tragedy unfold on in the media can but feel that the events of April 30, 1975 marked a dramatic end to U.S. involvement in Indochina. But though America suffered its final indignity in Vietnam as its citizens scrambled to safety via frenzied rooftop evacuations, this was not the end of a war; it was, perhaps more significantly, the end of an era.

Despite the arguments which support April 30, 1975 as the point at which the war ended, compelling arguments remain in favor of January 1973. Principal among them is the fact that, when the United States concluded the Paris Peace Accords, the cease-fire was viewed, at the time, as the end of the war for the Americans. Newsweek magazine proclaimed "Peace," and began it's lead article with the words "and so it was over..." Time magazine called it "A Moment of Subdued Thanksgiving," and talked about a 'postwar U.S.'³ Secondly, the cease-fire of 1973 certainly put the war on a new footing. Without U.S. combat support, the South Vietnamese military shouldered the entire combat burden. Saigon was forced to uphold its responsibilities in ensuring the

³ Peter Goldman, "For Whom the Bell Tolls," Newsweek, February 5, 1973, pp. 16-17; "At Last, The Vietnam Peace," Newsweek, February 5, 1973, pp. 18-24; and "The Cease-Fire," Time, February 5, 1973. See also "How U.S. Hopes to Make 'A Peace That Heals'," U.S. News and World Report, February 5, 1973, pp. 16-18; and the coverage in The New York Times, Sunday January 28, 1973, especially pp. IV-1-IV-3.

stability of the peace, regardless of any promises made by the United States.⁴

And third, in the wake of the truce, and the return of American POWs from North Vietnam, the United States turned its attentions away from Indochina and took a hard look inward. The peace in Vietnam, as problematic as it stood, would have to hold. To be sure, few informed observers believed that the fragile peace could withstand vigorous testing, nevertheless, the Paris agreement was roundly viewed as the point at which the war, for the United States, had ended.⁵

But even if one rejects January 1973 as the point at which the American war in Indochina ended, preferring instead the later date, the central argument of this thesis---that domestic politics operates as an important influence in certain instances of foreign policy decision-making---offers a powerful explanation for the events which led from the signing of the Accords to the collapse of Saigon in April

⁴ See "The Record on Promises to Saigon," Time, April 21, 1975, p. 9.

⁵ Henry Kissinger, the principal American architect of the peace plan, is reported to have held a dim view of South Vietnam's prospects in the post-truce order. John Ehrlichman recalled that on the day after President Nixon announced that a settlement had been reached, he had asked Kissinger how long he thought South Vietnam could last, given the terms of the agreement. Kissinger reportedly said "I think, that if they are lucky, they can hold out for a year and a half." John D. Ehrlichman, Witness to Power (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1982), p. 288.

1975. In these intervening months, Watergate, a post-war economic recession, a numbed indifference to the war which most Americans had come to have following the return of the POWs from Hanoi, and a sharp decrease in the economic aid to South Vietnam ordered by a Congress fed up with the war and the havoc it had wreaked upon the American society, all combined to prevent the United States from taking more decisive measures to prevent the fall of Saigon to the Communists.

Though the final collapse of Saigon occurred on April 30, 1975, the pace of its decline was markedly quickened ten months earlier by events in the United States. In the wake of the Watergate scandal Richard Nixon resigned as President, and the institutions of the American government were shaken to their foundations. To begin to restore equilibrium, Congressional leaders and the new President, Gerald Ford, cast off much of what had been wrong with the country over the past several years and, for the Americans, Vietnam had been very wrong.

Almost immediately following the signing of the Paris Accords Saigon had been receiving signals that the United States would not continue its support of South Vietnam indefinitely. In July 1973, the House of Representatives passed a supplemental appropriations bill carrying a rider that proscribed U.S. combat activities over all of

Indochina.⁶ Further evidence that the U.S. was detaching itself from the situation came as the number of American officials visiting Saigon dropped off dramatically over the course of the summer. And in December 1974, the U.S. Defense Attaché Office (DAO) in Saigon received a message which cited anticipated Congressional action to slash the military aid package to Indochina and asked that programs be identified for probable cuts.⁷ Though \$1.126 billion in aid was originally programmed for fiscal year (FY) 74, the figure dropped to \$900 million when the Department of Defense deleted operation and maintenance funds for the last half of the year. This move provided tangible evidence of the waning U.S. interest

The signs of further U.S. disengagement continued. In Congress, the momentum behind the effort to draw the final curtain on U.S. involvement in Indochina gained steam. In October 1973, by a vote of 75-20 in the Senate, and 238-123 in the House of Representatives, Congress approved the War

⁶ Second Supplemental Appropriations Act, 1973: Public Law 93-50, approved July 1, 1973. Though principally geared toward halting the bombing of Cambodia which President Nixon had ordered to stave off the onrush of the Khmer Rouge, this measure effectively put the lie to Nixon's secret promises to Thieu that the United States would respond 'with force if necessary' to egregious violations of the Accords by North Vietnam. The President was able to get an extension for the bombing to continue until August 15, 1973, but beyond that date there was no U.S. military future in Indochina.

⁷ Nguyen Tien Hung and Jerrold Schecter, The Palace File (New York: Harper and Row, 1986), p. 228.

Powers Resolution to sharply circumscribe the President's discretion in authorizing the use of force overseas.⁸ Nixon vetoed the measure on October 24, but Congress overrode the President's veto and the measure became law on November 7, 1973.⁹ On May 6, 1974 the Senate voted 43-38 to approve an amendment to a supplemental appropriations bill which prohibited the use of funds for or in any Southeast Asian nation. The funds for South Vietnam to continue to represent itself as capable of staving off an assault by the Communists were drying up.

A major blow to Saigon's confidence in continued U.S. support came with the revelations of the Senate Watergate Hearings. Richard Nixon found himself awash in a tide of accusations of criminal wrongdoing that threatened to cause his impeachment, and redirected his attentions to the domestic front. His political life at stake, he was no longer willing, or able, to serve as South Vietnam's advocate in Washington. Nixon's resignation in August 1974 was the final act of a President who, paralyzed by scandal and drained of all authority, had nearly done the same to the office he held. Just days before he resigned, Nixon signed a

⁸ "The War Powers Resolution: House Joint Resolution 542," 93d Congress, passed by the Senate on October 10 and by the House of Representatives on October 12, 1973.

⁹ The House voted 284-135 and the Senate voted 75-18 to override. The resolution became Public Law 93-148 (87 Stat. 555)

bill setting the aid ceiling for Vietnam at \$1 billion. And although Gerald Ford made a private pledge to the South Vietnamese to continue U.S. support, Congress voted to appropriate only \$700 million of those funds for FY 75.¹⁰

This Congressional act sent another strong signal to Saigon that the United States was washing its hands of the whole Vietnam business. Americans sympathetic to the rapidly deteriorating position of the South Vietnamese implored the administration not to forsake its ally. One wrote passionately: "To abandon South Vietnam to the dangers of destruction and massacre for the sake of a half billion dollars...would deal a crushing blow to our still mighty, if weakened, influence in world affairs."¹¹

This was not an argument, however, that could reverse the tide. America was divesting itself of its Indochina

¹⁰ Ford's letter to Thieu reiterating the promise of continued U.S. support to South Vietnam is reproduced in Hung and Schechter, The Palace File, p. 434. Retired Army Colonel Harry Summers, who flew to Hanoi in the last week before the fall of Saigon to try to negotiate with the North Vietnamese, believes that when Congress ordered the cutback in funding for South Vietnam from \$1 billion to \$700 million in the fall of 1974, they sent a clear signal to Saigon, and to Hanoi, that the United States was abandoning its ally to its fate. Interview with Colonel Summers, April 26, 1989.

¹¹ Memorandum from Warren Nutter, former Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs, to John O. Marsh, Jr., counsellor to President Ford, dated October 1, 1974. Cited in Hung and Schechter, The Palace File, p. 242.

responsibilities, regardless of the international costs. The domestic strains had simply become too powerful.¹²

The dwindling American support for South Vietnam did not go unnoticed by the North Vietnamese. Ever attentive to the domestic political situation in the United States, they too recognized the irreversible trend. With the aid appropriations for the coming year equaling roughly one third of that programmed from 1970-1973, the North Vietnamese surmised that the ARVN was ill-equipped to sustain battle. As 1974 drew to a close, the Communists prepared their final offensive.

South Vietnamese President Thieu repeatedly alerted U.S. officials to Hanoi's plan, but his calls went unheard by the American people who were bone-weary of the war. Thieu was ignored too by President Ford who was preoccupied with an economic recession, and by Senators and Representatives who were preparing for mid-term elections. Several months after Thieu first sounded the alarm, in a move as completely anticipated by the South Vietnamese as it was unplanned for by the United States, Hanoi launched its offensive on March 10, 1975.

¹² One account of the events in these last days of South Vietnam observed that "the consensus in Congress is overwhelming: the Vietnam War is lost." "The American Dilemma," U.S. News and World Report, April 21, 1975, pp. 17-19.

Though the offensive had been expected, the speed with which the Communist forces would reach the outskirts of Saigon was not. City after city fell: Hue, March 25; Da Nang, March 30; Cam Ranh, April 3; Xuan Loc, April 15. To assess the situation, President Ford had sent U.S. Army Chief of Staff General Frederick Weyand to Saigon on March 28. General Weyand returned with an urgent recommendation that \$722 million in supplemental aid be approved immediately and that the U.S. undertake B-52 air strikes against concentrations of NVA forces in South Vietnam.

On April 10, Gerald Ford addressed the nation on the situation in Vietnam. Recognizing that neither the Congress nor the American people would tolerate the reintroduction of any U.S. combat forces into Southeast Asia, the President did not raise even the possibility of renewed U.S. bombing to support the South Vietnamese. He asked, instead, that Congress approve the \$722 million recommended by Weyand, or at least a minimum of \$300 million, to "enable the South Vietnamese to stem the onrushing aggression...and if the very worst were to happen, at least allow the orderly evacuation of American and endangered South Vietnamese to places of safety."¹³ Ford gave Congress an April 19 deadline to respond to his request.

¹³ The transcript of the President's speech appears in the New York Times, April 11, 1973, p. 10.

On the morning of April 18, the Senate Armed Services voted to reject the request, and Henry Kissinger, now Secretary of State, solemnly read Saigon's eulogy: "The Vietnam debate has now run its course. The time has come for restraint and compassion. The Administration has made its case. Let all now abide by the verdict of the Congress---without recrimination or vindictiveness."¹⁴

On April 29, NVA rockets slammed into Tan Son Nhut air base just on the outskirts of Saigon. Twenty-four hours later, America left South Vietnam.

¹⁴ "Vietnam: No More Arms," Time, April 28, 1975, pp. 10-11. See also, "Where U.S. goes from Here," U.S. News and World Report, April 28, 1975, pp. 15-16; and "The U.S. Mood: Not One More Bullet," Time, April 28, 1975, p. 12.

Chapter 6

Assessing the Role of Domestic Politics in War Termination

The preceding examination of America's effort to end its involvement in the Vietnam war suggests provisional answers to the questions which set this study in motion: Why do large, powerful nations sometimes lose small, limited wars? and Why does it often take so long for great states to end such wars?

This work has argued that the major policy choices of a great state's leadership in the closing stages of an asymmetrical limited war---a war categorized by a marked power imbalance between the principal belligerents where the more powerful nation seeks only limited objectives---are best understood by looking at their domestic sources. There are many circumstances in international relations in which the external stimulus of foreign policy accounts for only a part--and in many cases only a small part---of the substance of that policy; domestic political considerations account for the rest. The timing, character, and potency of foreign policy is often less a response to external motivations than to domestic imperatives.

To support these claims, this study undertook two analytic tasks: the first was to elaborate an institutional conception of how domestic politics influences policy making in asymmetrical limited war termination. The second was to

defend a domestic politics approach against the challenge of structural realism.

Structural realism assumes that the motivation behind a state's behavior in its international dealings is tightly linked to the state's structural interests. These interests include such things as the acquisition of power, maintenance of security, and a concern for reputation. The findings of this study suggest, however, that this linkage between a state's international behavior and its structural interests might not always be so tight. Contrary to the expectations of structural realism, big nations don't always win their small wars. Moreover, a clearly superior power disengaging from an undesirable war by means of a long, protracted withdrawal offers further evidence that some basis other than structural interests can motivate state behavior.

This paper has attempted to demonstrate that structural realism is hard pressed to account for the termination of asymmetrical limited wars. For powerful nations in such a war, the major decisions involved in war termination appear to be heavily influenced by domestic political imperatives. And these imperatives can induce behavior dramatically different from that expected from an analysis of the state's structural interests.

This is not to say, however, that there is no role for structural factors in asymmetrical war termination. If these factors do not form the critical basis from which asymmetrical war termination decisions are made, it appears

they at least offer the opportunity for the war to end---that is, while systemic factors may not 'compel' a nation's leadership to end its war, neither do they prevent it from ending. When no structural impediments to war termination exist, the international system is permissive. Such situations present structural 'windows of opportunity' during which belligerents might, though they won't necessarily, conclude hostilities. But while an analysis of systemic conditions which hold over the course of a war may allow us discern times at which the war might end, it does not allow us to understand how the war will end during those opportunities.

The experience of the United States in Vietnam demonstrated that domestic political factors strongly influence the major war termination decisions. But how? This work adopted an institutional view of domestic politics and focused on the relationship between the political vulnerabilities of the nation's leadership and politics of allocating scarce resources to a limited war. A wider institutional view of domestic politics suggests that leaders are often as politically motivated making foreign policy as they are when dealing with domestic issues. This approach also differs from conventional views of the domestic level of analysis which consider only a small cast of actors with established patterns of interaction. The institutional view of domestic politics presented in this study attempts to capture more

broadly the dynamic political context of war termination decision-making.

From an institutional perspective, domestic politics influences war termination decision-making by: a) introducing political acceptability of a particular policy as a critical element in the decision-making calculus, and b) manifesting the implicit requirement that leaders achieve and sustain domestic policy legitimacy for their choices.

For any given foreign policy situation, innumerable courses of action, ranging on a continuum from taking no action to committing the whole of a nation's resource to achieving the objective, are available to national decision-makers. But what exactly determines which options are given serious consideration by the national leadership? Foreign policy choices depend on the interaction of two criteria: how well a particular alternative fulfills the objective---its effectiveness---and the material costs associated with that alternative. Because leaders are politically vulnerable at all times---even when formulating foreign policy---(though admittedly more so at some times than others), they evaluate a foreign policy option, not simply on the basis of whether or not it can 'get the job done,' but also based on their estimates of the political acceptability of that option.

Decisions to commit a nation's resources to an asymmetrical limited war involve much more than a simple estimate of the material costs associated with pursuing the objectives for which the war is fought. Domestic political factors play a

key role in leaders' evaluation of the consequences of assuming costs associated with any of the policies under serious consideration because resources are scarce and leaders are politically vulnerable. Therefore, a decision-maker's estimates of the domestic political consequences of incurring the costs associated with the various policy decisions account, in large measure, for which policy option is chosen, and which are discarded. In the termination of asymmetrical limited war then, political acceptability becomes the most important discriminating criterion for decision-makers contemplating policy choices. The decision maker's estimate of the political consequences of foreign policy options is the bridge between domestic politics and foreign policy.

That war termination decision-making is largely based on political considerations highlights the interesting relationship between objectives, means, and political will that distinguishes limited war from total war.

By definition, the objectives of a limited war do not approach those of total war. A limited war does not require the complete military destruction of one's enemy. Rather, it can be successfully terminated when a military objective that has been defined as the means to some limited political end has been achieved. Limited wars might be fought in order to secure or reclaim certain territory or restore a border. Decisive seizure of the territory or effective reinstatement

of a national frontier as a result of pitched battle means that the objective has been achieved and the war will end.

Rarely however, are limited wars so neatly concluded; there is often great difficulty in correlating battlefield accomplishments with the limited political objectives which the conflict is designed to achieve. Clearly articulated objectives and a straightforward relationship between the military action undertaken and those objectives are particularly important in limited wars. In the absence of explicit objectives, or in situations where military combat appears grossly inappropriate to the achievement of stated objectives, the end of a limited war becomes far more difficult to anticipate. One simply does not know what it will take to have the war end.

When a party to a limited war realizes that continued fighting and additional sacrifices will bring it no closer to its objectives, or when it realizes that its objective can be achieved only by expending unacceptably large resources, or when a belligerent anticipates that the battlefield situation will turn markedly unfavorable, it will be motivated to seek an alternative way out of the conflict, through negotiations, for example. The decision to end the fighting and pursue the issues of conflict through less costly means signifies the beginning of the war termination phase in limited wars. In 1968, Lyndon Johnson was persuaded by his advisers that continued warfare, with any hope of 'winning,' would require the allocation of considerable additional resources that the

administration simply could not justify to the American people. The war had become an extraordinary political liability for the President. Confronted with the fact that the objectives could not be achieved at a price the United States was willing to pay, the President announced that he was de-escalating the war and would seek a negotiated peace with the North Vietnamese.

Yet another important and distinguishing factor needs to be addressed, and this is the variable of 'political will.' The ability of a nation to wage war consists in the association of two factors: the total means available to a nation, in terms of resources, and the strength of a nation's political will to commit those resources to the achievement of the war aims. In other words, given issues over which nations are moved to armed conflict, do they have not only the means to wage war, but also the political will to use those means in pursuit of the defined objectives? Part of the answer to this question lies in knowing just how powerful a nation is.

The power capabilities of a nation---subject to some objective measurement---includes the human and material wherewithal a nation has available for commitment to a conflict. Total population, gross national product, the size of the organized military, among other examples, are surrogate indicators of national power. However it is measured and valued, the capacity of a state to wage war depends on its human and material resources, and these

resources are objectively limited and knowable. While one recognizes that the potential exists for third parties to continually resupply belligerents (suggesting that resources in war might be effectively unlimited), the point here is that there are objective and subjective components to warfare. 'Resources' is used here to capture the objective component.

In contrast, political will is a difficult, if not impossible phenomenon to measure with any degree of exactness or reliability. Its role in war, however, is undeniable.

Political will can be thought of as a nation's willingness to bear costs in pursuit of the objectives of a conflict. Hence, political will reflects the value placed on achieving those objectives---i.e. the level of costs and deemed acceptable to incur on behalf of those objectives. Understanding the role of political will in war enables us to understand better the relationship between a nation's power and the war outcome, and suggests the reason that large nations sometimes do lose small wars.

The value which a polity associates with war objectives calibrates the application of that nation's power capabilities in the war. For a society pursuing limited political objectives, the use of the nation's military to achieve those objectives is politically constrained. Indeed, over the course of the war, that polity's valuation of war objectives can change, with a corresponding influence on the resources committed to the conflict, particularly as costs

mount. If costs rise to generally unanticipated levels, a reconsideration of the war objectives results. While sacrifice does initially create value---a fact which no doubt accounts, in part, for a certain amount of sustained support for the war---at some point mounting sacrifices generate a reconsideration of the war objectives.

If a serious disconnect develops between the value which the society assigns to the stated goals of the conflict and the costs incurred or anticipated, then one of two things occurs: either the objectives are re-valuated and determined to be worth the costs, or the costs are determined to have exceeded the value of the objectives, in which case serious opposition to continued warfare, from within the nation, will emerge. And political activity to terminate the conflict will begin.

Conventional notions of military victory in war imply that if an opponent's military capability to wage war has been virtually destroyed, any desire on its part to continue the fight does not matter, because the means to that end no longer exist. But if we think of political will as the willingness to bear costs in pursuit of specified war objectives, then, depending on the objectives---particularly if they are limited---that willingness may be effectively bounded. Thus, if a nation is no longer willing to bear the costs associated with continued struggle, then the power of that nation to wage war, no matter how great, becomes totally irrelevant. This relationship between will and capability

offers an explanation for why large powerful nations lose wars to smaller and less powerful adversaries.

For the United States, the Vietnam War was a limited war; an implicit 'cost threshold' existed (though not one identified in advance), above which the will to continue absorbing costs associated with pursuing the articulated objectives of the war dramatically eroded. In time, the objectives of the war came to be seen as simply not worth the costs. By Autumn 1967, despite claims of progress, administration officials recognized that the aerial bombardment campaign, underway since 1965, had been largely ineffective in preventing or restricting the flow of supplies to the front (such as it existed) because the North Vietnamese Army's battlefield consumption represented only a very small percentage of the entire logistical system's capacity. Moreover, because the commitment of the North Vietnamese leadership was so strong, and the capacity of the North Vietnamese people to endure hardship and privation was so great, the bombing also failed to break Hanoi's will to fight. Further compounding the problem, and adding to U.S. war costs, was the fact that despite the infusion of large numbers of U.S. and ARVN ground combat troops, the allies could not achieve a decisive battlefield advantage by relying on the attrition strategy. Attrition failed because the enemy controlled the rate at which its forces were attritted by choosing, for the most part, the time, place, and duration

of engagements. The war dragged on, and U.S. casualties mounted.

As the reality of stalemate began to sink into the minds of increasing numbers of those advising President Johnson at this time, the sentiment developed that the war could not be won at a price the American people were willing to pay. As more time passed, passionate criticism of the President's policies claimed that the war was not worth winning at the price it would take to win. But for North Vietnam who perceived itself to be involved in a total war, the war objectives established a much higher cost threshold, extending, at the limit, to the whole of that nation's objective power capability. This considerable tolerance for costs associated with pursuing vital objectives dwarfed that of its opponent, despite the fact that that opponent's objective power capability (by nearly every measure) was far greater.

In asymmetrical conflicts, the political objectives of a limited war often translate only with great difficulty into military achievements on the battlefield, as compared against total war objectives which provide clearer military indications of success. Consequently, a nation involved in a limited war crosses its cost threshold relatively early compared to its opponent who is committed to total military victory. Throughout the course of the U.S. involvement in Vietnam, establishing a politically stable Saigon regime was

an objective of the war. But what this entailed militarily was never made explicit. Thus neither the commanders in Saigon nor the political decision-makers in Washington knew whether this objective could be achieved by, or require, the re-establishment of the integrity of the DMZ as an international boundary; the complete destruction of the extensive, if somewhat disorganized, communist infrastructure in South Vietnam; or merely a military safeguard for 'strategic hamlets' in the Provinces. No clear-cut answers ever emerged, and consequently battlefield accomplishments were largely devoid of political significance or meaning. For the United States---indeed for all belligerents---costs mounted as various strategies were tried and ultimately failed to guarantee the stability of the Thieu government.

For nations at war then, the higher the political will, the greater the costs that can, and will, be borne. Conversely, the higher the costs of the war, the greater the need for strong political will to continue to absorb those costs. In leading a nation involved in a limited war, national decision-makers must control the costs of the conflict, so as not to exceed the tolerance of the political will. Simultaneously, they must take steps to bolster the political will to ensure that the costs being incurred or anticipated, will be supported.

This relationship between political purpose, means, and will in armed conflict offers a basis from which to consider

the role of domestic politics in the termination of limited wars. As noted, if a war is fought for limited objectives, a cost threshold exists (though perhaps not easily definable at the outset), above which the will to continue absorbing costs associated with pursuing the objectives of the war precipitously declines, triggering serious efforts from within the nation to end the war. Therefore, a protracted, limited war represents a significant instance in which domestic politics heavily influences the foreign policy decision-making of the national leadership. As the costs of the war mount, domestic political groups have ever stronger incentives for attempting to influence the decision-making process, and with the extended duration of the war itself, these same groups have an opportunity to make those preferences significant to the leadership.

To understand the role of domestic politics in the termination of an asymmetrical limited war, three focal points, or critical decisions, were used in the study to frame the analysis: a) the point at which the leaders of the larger nation consciously decide to end the war, as opposed to continue the fighting; b) the way in which they chose to end it, and; c) their recognition that the war had indeed ended. These theoretical points translated into specific questions: When did the American leadership determine that it had to initiate efforts to negotiate an end to the war rather than let the fighting on the battlefield determine its

outcome? What strategy would they employ to bring the war to a close? and What conditions would need to hold for the North Vietnam and the United States to agree that the war had ended?

America's war in Vietnam began to end on March 31, 1968, the date that Lyndon Johnson announced that he was suspending a significant portion of the bombing of North Vietnam and would seek to negotiate a settlement to the war. From this moment onward, much of the policy effort in Washington shifted from war fighting (to achieve military 'victory') to war terminating. With the change in executive leadership in 1969, Richard Nixon confronted the task of shaping just how the war would end. He adopted a manifold strategy to end the war: it took the form of an attempt to negotiate a settlement with North Vietnam while gradually handing over the principal responsibility for fighting the war to the South Vietnamese in a process known as Vietnamization. In tandem with these actions, the President periodically ordered the incremental withdrawal of American troops from Vietnam to maintain domestic political acceptance of his overall policy.

Importantly, while the withdrawal of American troops was originally contingent upon the mutual withdrawal of North Vietnamese forces from South Vietnam, by May 1971, the U.S. had dropped this demand and continued its withdrawals on a unilateral basis. By the end of 1972, the moderated U.S. position on this critical issue of mutual withdrawal

reflected the administration's re-evaluation of the objectives of the war, and its scaling down of what the United States was likely to achieve. North Vietnam would be allowed to maintain its troops on the territory of South Vietnam, and the administration accepted a settlement containing this central provision.

These three presidential decisions: Johnson's decision in 1968 to de-escalate the war; Nixon's decision in 1969 to Vietnamize the war, withdraw American troops and pursue negotiations; and the decision to formally declare the war to be at an end in 1973, represent the significant policy choices taken during the process of ending U.S. involvement in the Vietnam War.

It is important not to discount the role that structural factors may have had in the formation of these decisions. The growing realization that North Vietnam's aggression in South Vietnam did not necessarily represent the spread of monolithic communism induced a reevaluation of this motivation for the war in the United States and allowed other considerations---domestic political considerations---to strongly influence decision-making. It seems clear that had this realization never set in---if the American leadership instead remained convinced that the vital interests of the United States were indeed dangerously threatened by a Communist victory in South Vietnam---it seems unlikely that they would have chosen to de-escalate the war just at the

point when it appeared that its battlefield position was strongest, regardless of domestic pressure. Thus while the change in attitude toward the Communist threat 'allowed' the United States to disengage from Vietnam with the assurance that its vital interests were not threatened, it did not compel that exit.

It has been a burden of this study to demonstrate that the policy decisions under examination here are, in the main, presidential responses to the domestic political imperatives, and not to the structural conditions (indeed, in some cases, particularly the announcements of troop withdrawals, it appears that the decisions were made in spite of the perceived external demands). A major finding is that, in important circumstances such as an asymmetrical limited war that develops into a prolonged, costly stalemate, domestic political considerations play a major role in foreign policy decision-making. The indepth analysis of the three decisions noted above strongly supports this claim.

In the Spring 1968, President Johnson considered three options to deal with the devastating domestic results of the Communist Tet Offensive: increase the level and intensity of the U.S. military commitment to end the war rapidly with a devastating military blow; maintain the current levels and intensity, hoping that the recent enemy offensive had seriously taxed North Vietnam to the point of exhaustion; and explore other means, i.e. diplomacy and negotiations, while reducing the level and scope of U.S. combat operations

in order to bring about a negotiated end to the conflict. Two of the options called for continuing the war at the same or higher level of intensity, and represented strong action toward achieving one of America's goals which was shoring up the Saigon regime. One of the three options---decreased U.S. military involvement in Vietnam---represented the option least well suited to accomplishing this objective.

Despite these considerations, decreased involvement is exactly what Johnson chose. Why? Were the costs of the two former options in terms of men and materiel inordinately high? No, in absolute terms, the costs of the war represented only a fraction of the war-making capacity of the United States. Johnson chose de-escalation because of his estimation of the domestic political consequences of choosing either of the two stronger military options. Thus, additional capabilities and resources available to support a given foreign policy objective are not the only standards (or in certain cases always the most desirable criteria) for determining foreign policy choices. Johnson's decision to de-escalate the war reflected his assessment of the domestic political realities which constrained the commitment of additional national resources toward the foreign policy goals for which the United States was fighting in Vietnam.

Similarly, Richard Nixon was compelled to step up the numbers and increase the frequency of troop withdrawals in order to diffuse the mounting domestic tensions---not because the battlefield situation, or progress in the Paris

negotiations supported such actions. Often, in fact, more troops and stronger U.S. military action seemed warranted. But by the end of 1972, it was clear that public tolerance for the war had reached its limits. Congress threatened to wrest control over events in Vietnam from the President's hands. For U.S. decision-makers there seemed little recourse but to accept the terms of settlement that fell short of what they had pursued.

Why do domestic political considerations assume such importance in foreign policy decision-making? A provisional answer is that, in certain situations, domestic politics requires that decision-makers secure policy legitimacy for their chosen courses of action. Policy legitimacy results when the majority of a nation's polity believe that certain foreign policy objectives are desirable, and that the particular policy course chosen to achieve those objectives will work.

The public is inclined to accept a President's policies as legitimate both because the President formulates and phrases policy choices consistent with values that Americans accept, and because they tacitly acknowledge his special knowledge and expertise in national level decision-making, particularly in the area of foreign policy. The 'rally effect' and the 'honeymoon' period suggest that legitimacy for a Presidential policy is established relatively easily at the outset of an important focal issue, such as U.S. involvement in Vietnam,

or in the early months of a new administration. There is, again at least initially, the general belief that the objectives of the President's policies are desirable, and that the policies themselves will work.

The President's real task is to sustain that legitimacy. He can do so in one of two ways, by either building a supportive consensus among the polity or by avoiding those actions which would encourage an empowered opposing consensus to form. The latter action is by far the easier of the two and may become the only alternative as the situation deteriorates. Thus the requirement for a President to maintain legitimacy for increasingly unpopular policies does not demand that a domestic consensus in support of a particular policy form; only that an 'empowered opposition' not form.

Opposition matters when those opposing have the means to effectively censure the President or undermine the implementation of his policies if he does not comply with their wishes. This is what is meant by an 'empowered opposition.' In the case of policy making during the terminal stages of a war, though opposition to a President's policies often forms in the general and informed publics, this opposition may not enough to induce a President to change his policies. Unless the pressure of these opposition groups is made salient to the President, via national elections for example, or unless significant elements of those agencies which vie for influence in the policy making process (such as

Congress with its power of the purse, or the Departments of State and Defense with their ability to impede the implementation of policy via bureaucratic foot-dragging) join the opposition, the President will not be compelled to change his policies.

The notion that the President need only avoid the formation of empowered opposition in order to sustain policy legitimacy while terminating a limited war represents a departure from conventional wisdom which holds that President's must actively work to sustain positive support for his policies. To be sure, an effective support network goes a long way toward preventing effective opposition from building. But maintaining active support, especially for an increasingly costly and unpromising foreign policy is exceedingly difficult, certainly more difficult than preventing effective opposition to that policy.

Aside from attempting to construct a supporting coalition, how does the President prevent empowered opposition to a particular policy from forming? By controlling costs. Nixon attempted just this when he took office in 1969. His strategy to end the war in such a way that the United States could salvage some of its objectives fundamentally rest on controlling the costs of the war---particularly the human costs---during the time it would take to reach a negotiated settlement. The President adopted a three-pronged approach: reduce the level of fighting involving U.S. forces through Vietnamization and gradual troop withdrawals; contain

domestic criticism and bolster American's political will to accept the fighting that did go on by demonstrating serious efforts to negotiate toward settlement and steady progress in Vietnamization; and, as necessary, carefully recast and devalue the objectives being pursued, by both diminishing the importance of their achievement and lowering the criteria by which achievement would be measured. Over the course of his entire first administration, Nixon had achieved some measure of success with this strategy.

Part of Nixon's success lay in the fact that the President was able to sustain domestic legitimacy for his program of Vietnamization. By steadily reducing U.S. involvement in the war, especially the highly valued human component of that involvement, Nixon was able to maintain the costs of continued involvement in the war below the threshold tolerance of the diminishing political will of the country. Vietnamization was a useful tool in the administration's efforts to prevent significant political opposition from building. Lyndon Johnson had been less successful in his efforts to sustain policy legitimacy. He attempted to control the costs of the war---and public criticism---by decreasing U.S. military involvement in piecemeal increments and by emphasizing the aerial bombardment campaign. At the same time he attempted to bolster the political will of Americans by stressing positive progress in the war and highlighting the disastrous consequences for South Vietnam, indeed the world, if the United States did not hold steady.

But as the inconclusiveness of the President's policies in the war became an ever more vivid reality to a widening circle of Americans, the will to continue the struggle began to erode.

The military, chafing under the material constraints imposed by Johnson's efforts to control costs, further exacerbated the President's problems. Given the task of waging the war, they naturally pressed hard and continuously for the resources which, by their estimates, were required to prosecute it successfully and expediently. Controlling costs became a constant struggle between the military who urged more and the President who insisted upon less. Moreover, when it became clear that the United States had not achieved a decisive military advantage on the battlefield in Vietnam, the press and certain opposition members of Congress began to question the objectives of the war and the price the U.S. was paying to achieve them. Skepticism regarding both combined to undermine the public's political will for continuing the conflict. The media exposure of the Tet Offensive and the chaotic battle for the U.S. embassy in Saigon fueled the growing debate that the administration had been less than straightforward with the American people about their country's progress in the war. The domestic outrage that resulted was made explicit to policy-makers through the same media and Congressional channels. By 1968, when the hawks joined the ranks of those critical of the president's policies, Johnson confronted domestic opposition that

possessed significant political leverage to induce a policy change---enough leverage, in fact, that the President opted to avoid a potentially embarrassing political confrontation with members of his own party and declared he would not seek re-election.

The President's decision to de-escalate the conflict did not result from successive military defeats on the battlefield; the U.S. suffered no such defeats. Nor did it result from the realization that the costs in terms of men and materiel were inordinately high; fiscal expenditures on the war averaged out to around 2% of the GNP over the course of the war (reaching a high of 3.2% in 1969), and U.S. troop strength at its height in Vietnam hardly exceeded one quarter of one percent of the total U.S. population. The means to wage war were available; the material capacity to absorb more costs existed---the will to bear those costs, however, did not. Johnson was forced to redirect his policies because the consensus that had built in opposition to his approach to the war had reached a critical, and politically fatal, point.

Thus, domestic politics do matter in war termination decision-making and they appear to do so for several reasons: 1) the value of a nation's objectives in a limited war importantly directs the amount of resources that nation is willing to devote to their achievement; 2) the relative values assigned to the human and material resources needed for war are determined within a polity, and consequently the amount of resources allocated to a limited war is often more

a political question than it is a material one; and 3) because national leaders are politically vulnerable, the need for domestic political support impels decision-makers to maintain policy legitimacy.

It would seem possible to generalize these findings to certain other foreign policy issues, if three conditions hold. First, the costs associated with a particular policy must potentially range high to affect a larger section of the polity. More people will become interested in the issues surrounding the policy if the high costs hold the potential for wide-spread effects. Society is more sensitive to human costs; shoe leather, auto tires, and grain are less compelling. Second, the timeframe for decision-making on the issue must be relatively long, such as in a protracted, indecisive conflict; and mechanisms must exist for political opposition to become meaningful to the decision-maker---national elections, for example. Third, a strong group whose interests countervail those in opposition to a President's policy (which would thus offer the President a means to offset the criticism) cannot exist.

Before closing, an important point should be made. One of the underlying assumptions in war termination is that states seek to end wars rapidly in order to avoid incurring unnecessary costs. But at least two structural incentives---alliance considerations and reputational concerns---and a number of domestic constraints may, on occasion, motivate a

nation's leadership to prolong the termination process. Because a nation's leaders have decided that a war must end they do not necessarily want it to end abruptly by pulling up stakes and departing. An action of this type could give rise to serious questions in the minds of friend and foe alike regarding the departing nation's worthiness as an ally. A hasty and ill-conceived departure might undermine whatever reputation for steadfastness a nation might have, sending the wrong signal to its adversaries. Thus a 'decent interval' becomes desirable in itself to avoid irreparable damage to one's international reputation. There may also be compelling domestic reasons for a leadership to prolong the termination process. The desire to salvage some of the war aims in order to justify sunk costs, the desire to avoid being seen as having 'lost' the war, and the need to sustain sufficient legitimacy for a particular policy in order to accomplish other important foreign and domestic policy objectives are examples of strong domestic incentives to prolong the termination process.

And finally, the United States' asymmetrical limited war in Vietnam belongs to a class of wars characterized by three things: first, the principal belligerents are dramatically mis-matched in power capabilities; large nations are fighting small ones. Secondly, the war for the more powerful state is limited, while the conflict for the weaker state is total giving the smaller state a motivational advantage. And finally, in wars of this type, the more powerful nation

failed to defeat its smaller adversary and emerged from the conflict with its power and prestige severely damaged for the experience.

There are a number of cases of limited wars in which large powerful nations confront smaller adversaries and the wars end, to the disadvantage of the larger power, as a direct result of domestic factors; Britain in the Boer war, and France in Algeria or Vietnam suggest themselves. The Soviet Union's experience in Afghanistan would make for a fascinating comparative study, particularly since the internal configuration of the Soviet Union differs so substantially from western democracies. The ultimate objective of systematic inquiry is to apply the findings of this study to other cases. This remains as future work, and indeed there is fertile ground for such an undertaking.

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Interviews

The following individuals were interviewed by the author and agreed to allow their remarks, in whole or in part, to appear in this study for attribution:

Alain Enthoven

Walt W. Rostow

Harry G. Summers, COL, USA (Ret)

Archival Material

Allan E. Goodman Collection. Hoover Institution Archives,
Stanford University.

Papers of Richard M. Nixon. Hoover Institution Archives,
Stanford University.

The following collections at the Lyndon B. Johnson Library in
Austin, Texas, were used in the preparation of this work:

White House Central Files, Meeting Notes File, Boxes 2-3

National Security Files, NSC History of the March 31st
Speech, Boxes 47-49.

National Security Files, Country File Vietnam, Boxes, 68-
69, 93-95, 102-105, 127.

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White House Central Files, Confidential File, ND19/CO 312,
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